

FROM THE EDITOR OF GAMEFAN...

VOL. #1, ISSUE 1

GAMEGO!



TREASURE GOES PS2!!!

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PANIC**

PEDAL TO THE METAL

**GRAN TURISMO 3
FIRST REVIEW**

MOVE OVER POKÉMON

**MONSTER
RANCHER 3**

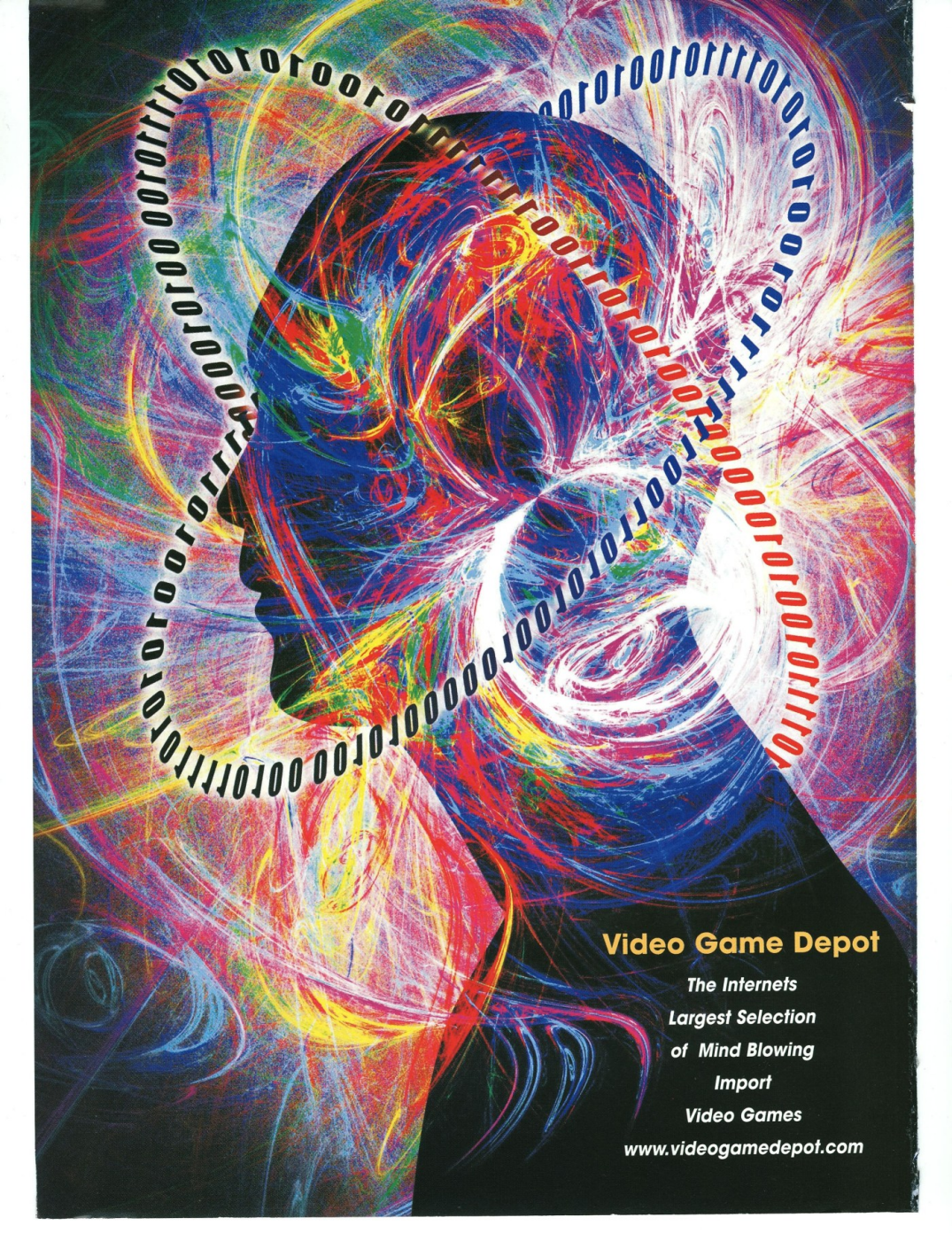
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EXTREME DEADLINES REQUIRE EXTREME SOLUTIONS



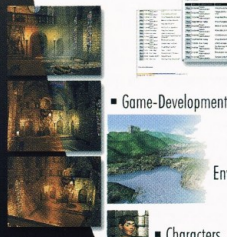
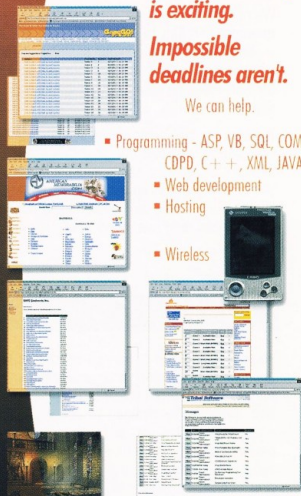
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Read This First

This section will appear in every issue, with changes made accordingly as time goes by, so always check here real quickly at the beginning of an issue for any updates!

Who We Are

We're a bunch of lucky saps that get to play games for a living, share our experiences and hopefully entertain you a bit along the way. We are not journalists, private detectives, or rock stars. Furthermore, we are not owed our jobs, and we very acutely appreciate this fact.

We're here to serve you, the reader, first and foremost and aim to do right by you at the expense of ad revenue, our sanity and our relationships in the industry—our integrity is the only thing we have, and we will not sully that.

Readers are our lifeblood; we live and die by you, and if something is what it appears to be, we'll tell you—a spade is a spade, et al. We understand that, in our position, we have an obligation to be as forthright and honest as possible, and we don't take that duty lightly.

Our Rating System

You're either going to love us or hate us for this, but after sampling a large swath of mail (email, that is) from readers going into our first issue, we've decided to not include a numerical, letter, or any other form of grading scale with our reviews—we will allow the strength of our (hopefully) witty prose to do the talking for us. Besides, how do you really assign a numerical value to an experience?

And sure, some of you will think we're copping out and some of you will be utterly confused (at least initially). However, it all comes down to our belief that the words we write should be of the utmost importance and not the grade we give. This should have the net effect of forcing people to "listen" to what was said, instead of merely rattling off a letter or number that they believe tells the whole story.

Personally, we can't wait to see some of the early mail we will invariably see asking "where the hell are the scores?!" And as we casually mention "did you happen to read the section entitled 'Read This First'..." we'll all sit back and have a nice chuckle...at their expense.

Our Review Philosophy

As each member of our staff is an individual with a wide variety of tastes, experiences and personal biases (yes, you read that correctly, biases), we want to make it painfully clear that our reviews are subjective in nature. Now while most of you are aware of this, we'd like to take a moment and clear this up, here and now, for everybody just joining us.

I usually like to make the point that if the Supreme Court can't remain objective on things, what hope for the rest of us mere mortals? The fact is, people bring preconceived notions, biases and opinions to everyday events—we're no different, and we're not going to hide behind the veil of 'objectivity' that so many malcontents use: "After all, beyond identifying colors and reading eye charts, human beings are pretty much incapable of being objective at all"—as one of ECM's favorite columnists is very astute to point out.

For example, if you hate a certain genre, how likely is it you're able to remain objective? Same goes for if you love a genre. Do you enter some sort of Zen-like state and push aside all your previous experiences and judge solely on objective criteria—a measure that changes with every person on the planet. The fact is, nothing can truly be reviewed objectively: you need a frame of reference to work from, and it's our hope that you will find an editor to which you relate to and can trust nine times out of ten.

However, even if you can't, that doesn't mean the reviews are worthless: after all, if you find yourself always thinking the exact opposite of what a particular reviewer says, that would be just as strong an indicator of how you would feel about the topic in question.

Where's 'X' Game?!

GameGO! is not about following the pack. Nor are we about constantly regurgitating the same set of games over and over, every month, which just about everyone else happens to be covering. So you won't see rampant coverage and analysis of one screen shot from Metal Gear Solid 2, nor will you see us rewarding games based on how they look from videotape (i.e. no game of show awards for a game we can't play).

Furthermore, we're here to cover the unnoticed, the left out, and the passed over—after all, we all know that whatever Yu Suzuki's latest game happens to be, it's going to be covered...to death. We'd rather take the space and shine the spotlight on something a bit more low-key, but just as good (as in this month's cover story, *Stretch Panic*).

Or in the case of whether we devote ample pages to the latest blasé cart racing game: we'd rather take that space and show you something (good or bad) that you won't see anywhere else. Games like *Guwange* or *Velvet File*, for example—after all, if you want to read about other games, you've got lots of options, <snicker>, to choose from.

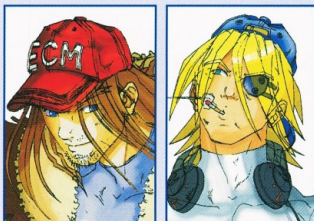
Which is not to say we won't cover MGS 2 or the latest Yu Suzuki mega-title: just don't expect to see them get the lion's share of the attention, month-in, month-out for 6 months straight.

This Is Your Magazine

It's been said millions of times in countless publications, but we mean it: if you want more of something, tell us! If you want less of something, tell us! We have no problem steering the ship into uncharted waters, by the seat of our pants, but some help from the readership on navigation never hurt—as long as Pokey isn't at the helm. So if you want to see some changes, additions, subtractions, let us know!

Errant Bits of Info

Starting next issue, GameGO! welcomes Shidoshi (of GameFan/AnimeFan fame) back to the fold in full fruitilicious glory.



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GAMEGO!

What you're holding in your hands is the first step in a new way to look at video games. A way not based on advertising revenue, political correctness, or what the mindless masses of sheeple want to see. It's a publication for gamers only: people that got left behind by the mainstream when our hobby exploded into a business bigger than movies and music and decided that its mantra would be "by the masses, for the masses"—well, we're not interested...and if you're cradling this tome in your hands, likely you aren't either.

If you want to see unending coverage of the same ten games, month-in, month-out you've got plenty of options and a whole Internet full of sites that'll give you that for free. We're more interested in giving you things you can't find anywhere else: heavy duty import coverage; a healthy dose of retro-gaming; weird fringe games and stories. And when we do cover the mainstream and domestic stuff, you can bet it'll focus more heavily on the smaller titles that are generally ignored by the other publications.

Yes, you'll see coverage of Sonic and Snake and Mario too—after all, just because it's popular doesn't mean you shouldn't be playing it. But we're not going to deluge you with page after page of such, every month. After all, what's the point? Do you really need 100 screenshots and a walk-thru of a five minute demo? If you do, you know where to find it.

All of this backed up with the most painfully honest reviews of any gaming publication on the planet. No candy-coated drivel here. We work for you, not the advertiser or PR person. And if you haven't done it yet, please turn to "Read This First" and take a gander at our philosophy—if what we say there doesn't resonate, put the magazine down and pick up a copy of EGM or GamePro. Our guess is they're slightly more your speed. But if you want it straight, there's only one place to turn.

And while we do it, we hope you enjoy our take on things: we're here to talk to you like you're one of our friends. We're not here to try and sound like we're applying for a job at Encyclopedia Britannica or a position at the, <shudder>, NY Times—we're here to talk to you as equals; as fellow gamers. Besides, we're just a lucky bunch of guys (and gal) that get to do

this for a living—something we aren't going to take for granted (or forget).

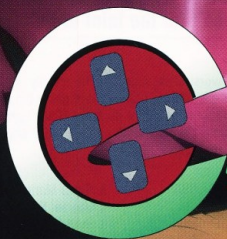
Finally, this is by no means a perfect product: we're going to be tweaking and tuning every step of the way. Stagnation is death, so expect major changes, fairly often, to keep things fresh, interesting and perhaps most importantly, entertaining. After all, we realize that while you're reading this magazine, you probably have a hundred other things you could be doing and we recognize and appreciate that...

So sit back, relax, and take it all in. If you have any concerns, doubts (or maybe even some praise) please write and let us know. We're doing this for you, which makes you the boss. We look forward to what you think, and we'll see you online (via our daily updates) and next issue, same time, same place. Hopefully it'll be a long, strange trip...<grin>.

See you next game...GO!

ECM
Eric C. Mylonas
Editor In Chief/Co-Publisher,
GameGo! Magazine





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Editors Assemble

ecm@gamegomagazine.com

ECM (a.k.a. Eric Mylonas): The over-excited, over-shout captain of our sturdy ship. An avowed fan of the 'old school' shooters, classics and, of course, 2D games. If there was ever a man in GameBoy Advance designed for (both in size and scope), he'd be it



For our first issue, it's introductions all around to give you a brief peek into the minds of each of our ersatz editorial staff. The elderly, small children and those with weak constitutions may want to opt out—this crew isn't for the faint of heart.

ECM

He's been described as surly, bitter, arrogant, and worst of all, short. But he actually has a heart of pure gold: you just have to chip through three layers of ice, bile and scar tissue to get to the half karat lump in the middle (just how many hammer blows does it take to get to the center of ECM's heart—we don't intend to find out). But when our 'happy go lucky' leader isn't sympathizing with the LAPD or pouring boiling oil on atheists, he can be a pretty swell guy—for a Republican.

TOP 10

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Stretch Panic - PS2 | 5. Dracula: COTM - GBA | 8. Super Mario Advance - GBA |
| 2. Klonaa 2 - PS2 | 6. Guilty Gear X - DC | 9. Vagrant Story - PS |
| 3. Monster Rancher 3 - PS2 | 7. M.U.S.H.A. - Genesis | 10. Skull Monkeys - PS |
| 4. Tiny Toons - GBA | | |

kodomo@gamegomagazine.com

Kodomo (a.k.a. Matt Van Stone): Imported from the UK, our resident racing/Takken/RPG freak also smokes a mean pack of cigarettes (he started at the tender age of 25) and like fine British ale, he's slightly bitter (and can give you a massive headache with too much exposure). But he's the man to talk to when it comes to the 'mainstream' stuff.



KODOMO

While it's now the stuff of legend, Kodomo started smoking at the spry age of 25—long after you're supposed to know better. But that's not the only thing he was a little slow on: after being "abused" by another player in a friendly game of soccer, he felt it necessary to "regulate," i.e. teach the little rotter a lesson (after all, bruised shins hurt). So he threw him to the ground and kicked dirt in his face. Of course he always leaves out one detail: the wicked villain of our story, the shin-smasher, had...Polio. Class act? Not Kodomo!

TOP 10

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Phantasy Star Online - DC | 5. RE: CV Complete - DC | 8. Skies of Arcadia - DC |
| 2. Sakura Taisen 3 - DC | 6. Vagrant Story - PS | 9. Ogre Battle 64 - N64 |
| 3. Ridge Racer V - PS2 | 7. Tekken Tag Tournery - PS2 | 10. Rage Racer - PS |
| 4. Ring of Red - PS2 | | |

shou-sama@gamegomagazine.com

Shou-sama (a.k.a. Eric Chung): Our technical expert: sure, he may think he's smarter than you, but we're pretty sure it's to hide a massive inferiority complex...that, or some other shortcoming (that the ladies in his life would better be able to attest). That being said, this guy knows his stuff and if you want to know the Japanese release catalogue for Nintendo circa '83, he's the man to talk to.



SHOU-SAMA

What do you call it when someone thinks they always know more than you even when they don't? Around GO! we call him Shou-sama. Yes, that's right, folks, Shou-sama is a know-it-all, one of those lost souls that simply refuses to believe that you could possibly know more than he does about video games. And while he may or may not know more about games, his knowledge has come at considerable personal expense: just ask him what he knows about girls, and he'll always come back with an addled look and a forlorn expression: "Girls? What are they?" Don't worry, Shou, you'll never know.

TOP 10

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. Dead or Alive 2 Hardcore (PS2) | 5. Guilty Gear X (DC) | 8. Virtua Fighter 3tb (Arcade) |
| 2. Dead or Alive 2 (DC) | 6. Blood The Last Vampire Chapter 1-2 (PS2) | 9. Vampire Savior 2 (Arcade) |
| 3. Bloody Roar 3 (PS2) | 7. Crisis Force (Famicom) | 10. Ogre Battle (Saturn) |
| 4. Klonaa 2: lunatea's veil (PS2) | | |

haohmaru@gamegomagazine.com

Haohmaru (a.k.a. Tom Keller): Haohmaru is also a man who takes his games exceedingly seriously—how many other people do you know that run import shops and actually cut down the games they're trying to sell? Needless to say, his brutal honesty has probably cost him some serious dough...which makes him a perfect fit for our ragtag band of gaming rebels.



HAOHMARU

Haohmaru runs five businesses: a candle company (don't ask); a game store (VGD); this fine publication (he put up the \$\$\$); and a marriage (that counts twice). What this means is that he doesn't have time to do a lot of what the rest of the staff refers to as 'work,' i.e. sit around and play games all day. Therefore he doesn't have a lot of extra time to contribute to the book as much as he'd like. But since he doesn't have the spare time to properly raise his two children—"Mommy, who's my daddy?"—we won't hold that against him (too much).

TOP 10

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Ring of Red (PS2) | 5. Chrono Cross (PS) | 8. Devil May Cry (PS2) |
| 2. Dracula X (Gameboy Advance) | 6. Grandia II (DC) | 9. Sengoku Blade (Saturn) |
| 3. Guilty Gear X (DC) | 7. Metal Slug 3 (Neo Geo) | 10. Dark Arms (Neo Geo Pocket Color) |
| 4. Record of Lodoss War (DC) | | |

Pokey@gamegomagazine.com

Pokey (a.k.a. Rich Depping): If there's one thing you can expect from Pokey, it's gaming reviews in layman's terms: "this f-n game rules because it's got a monkey. That game sucks so hard I wouldn't buy it with YOUR money." Despite this grievous lack of tact, Pokey knows his games, even if he's a f-n cro-magnon.



POKEY

If you need help when the chips are down; or it's the last minute and something really needs to get done; or, hey, maybe you desperately need some games reviewed to ship your new magazine upon which your reputation rests or you'll miss your deadline and watch your reputation plummet into the ground, <ahem>, sorry... In any event, Pokey is the last guy you'd want to call. But what he lacks in 'seize the day' attitude ("I'd rather sleep in...till Tuesday") he makes up for with poetic prose: "game good...mmm, graphics pretty...want to touch pretty lady's bre—" yes, well, thank you Shakespeare.

TOP 10

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Phantasy Star Online (DC) | 5. Doraemon (DC) | 8. Klaymen * Klaymen (PSX) |
| 2. SegaGaga (DC) | 6. Street Fighter Alpha II (SNES) | 9. Bangaioh (N64) |
| 3. Jet Set Radio (DC) | 7. Shining Force (Genesis) | 10. Mario Story (N64) |
| 4. Conker's Bad Fur Day (N64) | | |

Don't Call Them Hardcore...

His name is Millar—Chris Millar. And in addition to slaving over a hot website on what we'd gather is a regular basis (humbly named www.millartime.com), he also has a penchant for stickers...the kind he covered his Mustang GT in...the kind that, by all rights, should get you beat up when you roll into town on a Friday looking to kick it down to the ladies. But somehow, he's still in one piece (and so, apparently is his car).



So for our inaugural DCTH, we give you the Ultimate Gaming Mustang GT, replete with stickers (if we wanted to make it to sound cool, we'd call them decal's) from such industry luminaries as:

- Konami • Sega • Sony • Enix
 - Taïto • SNK • Treasure
- And, for the musically inclined (or mentally ill, depending on your P.O.V.):



DREAM THEATER!!!

Apparently GameGO! will also be getting the royal decal treatment—hey, when we're talking about us, it's decal all the way, baby!

So we salute you, Chris, it takes serious guts to take gaming as far as you have—destroy some sorry Camaro for us the next time you get the chance (Editor's Note: ECM's opinion of Ford vs. Chevy is not representative of the rest of the magazine...oh, who are we kidding—run those mullet-wearin' mutants off the road!).

Kasumi's Korner

Living with a gaming addict...



I married a gaming addict. I didn't realize what our lives would be like. First there were a couple of new systems in the house, then a few stand up machines. Now we have a whole room dedicated to games old and new. My 2 year old can find just the games she wants. No matter were I hide them. She must have the disease—I think you're born with it. I ask my daughter what

movie she would like to watch and she tells me Samba De Amigo. She can hardly say mamma, but video games she pronounces clearly. Now I find my self working on a game magazine; I don't even like video games. Last week we had a lot of rain I told my husband there was small flood in the basement, the first thing he said was "did my boxes get wet," that would be the 8 boxes of various video games from the last 20 years we could not fit in our game room. Is there life with an addict, sure just as long as you don't need to spend any time with them. —Kasumi

Debra Keller

kasumi@gamegomagazine.com

The brains behind the layout of the mag. She brings over 15 years of print experience to the staff—something that the above group of crazed drooling lunatics don't know much about.

LAST MINUTE MANIA

Sonic Plays Pool

It's funny what people will dig up when you ask for the weird wild and wonderful when you're putting a game magazine together. Case in point: these screens that are apparently from an unfinished version of the game Sonic Xtreme, which sadly, never made it out on Saturn (we got Sonic 3D Blast instead...blech). Certainly looks very nice, doesn't it? Sonic 3D Pool is the name of the (bonus) game, and apparently all we'll be able to do is sit and wonder, "what if...?" Thanks to the anonymous sender that provided these images, last minute-style!



Llamas

It's never fun being laid off (and believe us, we know the feeling). So when some employees of an unnamed development studio west of the Mississippi (based in a city



not known for its heavy party atmosphere and has received little acclaim in recent years) were 'let go', they decided to exact some subtle revenge. Note the placard in the picture that reads: "Product Development Mission Statement: Develop Quality and Commercially Viable Games That Are Creative, Fun, Competitive, On Time and Within Budget." And note the magazine residing directly to the left: one of the final issues of the Official Dreamcast Magazine with its numerical ranking of all US-released DC games. If you could read the tiny, itty-bitty, text you'd note that the games in question were developed by the fine dev studio mentioned here...and ranked in the bottom 5-10 DC games ever released. We're not naming names, but let's just say we're in total agreement with ODCM—someone best remove that placard and replace it with: "Any game we can bang out in 6 months and foist on a bunch of people that equate a good license with a good game." Is it any wonder the company in question is teetering on the edge of oblivion...we sure as hell don't think so.

FINAL ANALYSIS

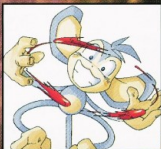
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HAOHMARU

KODOMO

POKEY

THE 6th MAN

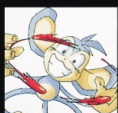


Angel Present
PlayStation 2
Nippon Ichi Software
RPG
Reviewed page 31

Despite the hit my masculinity took when I played it, I quite enjoyed *Rhapsody on PS*. Now that the PS2-based sequel is here, I think I'm over my flirtation with girly games. Sure, the opening musical song and dance number was kinda cool in a creepy train wreck sort of way (the horror... and yet I can't look away!) and the soundtrack is wonderful, but the gameplay is basic and lackluster with standard RPG fare the order of the day. And how is it that this game is less graphically impressive than the previous PlayStation game? The animation is decent but nothing truly stunning and the 3D background, frankly, suck. Needless to say, yet another hit and run by PlayStation 2 hardware—at some point someone better come up with a way around the bloody RAM/bandwidth bottleneck or I'm going to crack some more serious skulls at Sony R&D.



The rest of the staff picks on me because I'm the only one that really enjoyed *Angel Present*: the lovely, super-Japanese feel makes me feel all warm and fuzzy. So what if the animation is a bit lacking and the backgrounds are sorta' ugly—the music is ace and the gameplay is hyper cute and super-whimsical. Too bad Mr. Jaded Man next door can't seem to figure out that a game doesn't have to push the technology envelope on PS2 to be fun. So laugh with it, play with it and realize that any game with a stirring musical intro can't be all that bad—right?

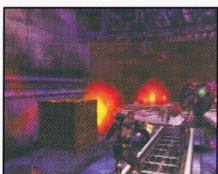


Armored Core 2 AA
PlayStation 2
From Software
Mech Combat
Reviewed page 28

I am an *Armored Core* fan to the well, core. Only thing is, it's starting to get a little long in the tooth; a bit over the hill, and frankly, really tired. I'm with Hah on this one: if you're into the fourth iteration of a title, there needs to be some serious overhauls made to keep the game viable and fresh. After all, every time you see a new Mario game, you get innovation mania—too bad From's one stab at innovating on their own formula, *Frame Gride*, met with abject failure. This game is AC through and through, though, and is still leagues better than *Gun Grifon Blaze* and the laughable *J Phoenix*, and yeah, the insidious slowdown of the previous chapter has been (mostly) tamed but when it comes right down to it, I've pretty much had enough. I'll take some *Frame Gride 2* (or an update to the *Leynos* series) but this is the end of the road for me and AC—I'll not have a fifth serving.



Here we are with From and their latest foray into the *Armored Core*. errm, "saga". Fortunately, this is From's greatest strength (see: *Frame Gride*). We won't go into their RPG's. No platform begs sequelitis - you won't find it in the dictionary, use your imagination - as does the PlayStation 2. While the inevitable English conversion awaits, the import will have to do and the English voice option will help to ease the pain. The combat system, graphics, and "feel" are much improved over previous installments in the series. However, when sequels start entering their 4th and 5th incarnations, it's time for a new idea or a radical change in the body of the work. *Armored Core 2: AA* enters this wasteland as a game that's been done one too many times and warrants a new look only from fans of the previous AC's or newbies to the series.



Extermination
PlayStation 2
Deep Space/SCSI
Survival Horror
Reviewed page 25

What do you get if you combine *Metal Gear Solid*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Resident Evil* (besides a marketing person's wet dream)? Apparently something like *Extermination*, which made a valiant attempt to be all things to all people, and went down fighting in the process. It's not that the game screams *deja vu* every ten seconds or the complete lack of nearly anything akin to an original idea that brings it down (if that were the case, most games would go nowhere fast). No, it's the stupidly twitchy control and exceedingly blasé gameplay that you've played a hundred thousand times before. And hey, let's not forget the omnipresent jiggies. Oh, and speaking of the control, fear ledges like a politician fears the truth. And did I mention that it apparently shipped incomplete? No? Guess I just did.



I played *Extermination* for longer than any mortal should play a mediocre game, hoping and waiting for it to get better—after all, good things come to those who wait, right? Well if you've been waiting for a fantastic PS2 survival horror title, the vigil continues. The good points include a fully customizable Colt rifle and an above average sense of suspense, but even those few bright spots are quickly eclipsed by the laughable AI, simplistic gameplay and jagged graphics—not to mention just about the touchiest control of any game in years. It's practically mediocre in every way, falling squarely into the bum off a friend category (a.k.a. "the ECM DVD library").



After many, many months of delays, here it is: Sony's flagship title (and in some circles) the make or break title. GT3 would've been amazing a year ago when it should have been gracing the presence of PlayStation 2 owners.

Unfortunately, Gran Turismo 3 breaks down beyond the car and immediate track, graphically. The backgrounds are marred with noisy pixelation and what seems to be the designers looking to do more and succeeding less than they should've (you'll notice that sunlight breaking through the 'forest' looks more like a massive row of Christmas trees with blinking lights than it does a realistic effect). However, image is never everything and GT3 does deliver pure racing fun and seemingly endless unlockable cars, items, and goodies. Recommended for slaves and fans of auto racing—not for those looking for the definitive next generation game.



Apathy: That's the one word I can think of that completely sums up the GT experience for me. It's not that I hate the game...and it's not that I love it—I just don't care. The graphics are good (no, not great—the aliasing on the backgrounds is horrendous and the 'sparkles' will drive you mad while the car models are stunning—revel in the dichotomy); the sense of speed is fantastic when you get your car jacked up with better engines, tires, chips, etc. But it's the king of unlocking gameplay and I'm just not up for that, nor am I up for the sim-like elements. If I want to play a racing game, it's Daytona, Rage Racer or F-Zero—white-knuckle, balls-to-the-wall arcade racers, not...uh...what was I talking about again?



Gran Turismo 3
PlayStation 2
Polyphony/SCEI
Racing
Reviewed page 20

Hmm...this is rather odd...in a bad way. It's a faster version of Armored Core with mechs that look ripped straight from VOOT, landing it squarely between the two somewhere in the gray misty realm of gaming limbo. It doesn't have the action of VOOT, nor the depth and customizability of AC and everything else it does is average at best. The missions are all 'seek and destroy' and are rather simple when you realize that your magic whacking stick will smite any foe in a few hits. Needless to say this '\$20 demo' (sorry, but once you get past free for a demo, it's not a demo anymore) isn't worth the sand it's plastered on.



Um, for starters, why would anyone pay \$20 for a demo? Secondly, if you're going to pay \$20 for a demo, why would you pay it for such a lackluster package? As everyone else has amply noted, this game is a complete and utter Armored Core clone from the bottom up, with more than a passing resemblance to VOOT in the robot design department. In fact, the best part of this 'demo' is the fact that after you've shelled out \$20 for it, you now know well in advance that you shouldn't touch the final with a ten foot poll. Granted, this game might have gotten more of a fair shake if they did what most companies with demo software do: give it away for free.



J Phoenix
PlayStation 2
Takara
Mech Combat
Reviewed page 29

Namco's update of Klonoa is hit and miss for me. On the one hand, the cel shaded visuals are great, coupled with some outright fun levels (such as surfing and snowboarding), but there just doesn't seem to be enough Klonoa to go around. It is entirely possible to complete the game in one sitting, all the while enduring some screens that last no longer than 10 seconds before it's off to loading ville again (just down the street from Jaggie Town). The soundtrack is awe-inspiring, and the mix of levels is grand, but there's just not enough of it—unless you feel you have to collect every knick-knack in every level (presumably to earn a better ending). Me, I'm more from the 'show it all, baby' school of thought.



Wow! It may have taken a year, but PS2 has a killer app! Initially I was put off by the grievously easy difficulty (this, people, is the PS2's Kirby 64), but the stunning play mechanics and fantastic level of technique save it. Oh, and just ignore the fact that it seems to have borrowed quite a bit from Sonic Adventure (oh yes, Namco's designers spent a lot of late nights with that one). Some of the graphics are absolutely stunning; jaggies are nearly unnoticeable; and the music...good lord, the soundtrack is heavenly—pray that Namco keeps the singing in on one of the many amazingly fun snowboard sequences for the US rev. Keep this up, Namco, and you and I can be great friends again (Tekken bad, Klonoa good).

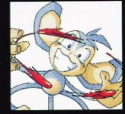


Klonoa LV
PS2
Namco
Platformer
Reviewed page 30

Monster Farm was crack on the PS, and MF3 is like the watered down version, with a massive upgrade and some questionable changes. I don't mind that only the monsters are cel shaded, the game looks damn good and exactly what MF should be like: playing a cartoon. Unfortunately, I think the Pokemon influence is starting to get to Tecmo too much and some of the changes (such as the new trainer) seem designed to compete with that game, rather than focusing on the top notch game MF always was. Still, it's the only game in town for the create-a-monster from a CD/DVD feature.



Just to get this out of the way: I love fruity Japanese games! The sillier and fruitier, generally, the better. And Monster Rancher (or Farm) 3 hits all the right fruit buttons. For starters, the game now more resembles the cartoon series that you can catch at 5:30 AM in most major markets, with some stellar cel shading and wonderful, living and breathing (and cuddly) monster critters to raise at your leisure. I quite enjoy the newly cinematic look to the battles, where they letterbox the action as your gladiator prepares to unleash a blistering attack and the new inclusion of DVD-based monster creation rounds out a super good time.



Monster Rancher 3
PlayStation 2
Tecmo
Monster SLG
Reviewed page 22



PNN2
PlayStation 2
Beluga/Victor
Flight Sim
Reviewed page 26

OK, I'm not even a little bit into flight sims, but this is just silly. PNN2 is to flight sims what Ralph Nader is to the average American: completely out of touch and amazingly ugly. If you're going to make a flight sim, maybe there should be an element or two of sim—landing your plane, and taking off again or only a few of the many, many 'sim' elements. The free-flight missions make the questionable Sky Odyssey look like the next coming of Falcon 6.0. And the graphics! It's usually fun to mock the PS2's painful jaggedies, but how about a game that wouldn't look good if it was a PlayStation game running on the PS2's upgraded drivers...now that would be something truly special and, apparently, is.



PNN2 is not Aerowings/Ace Combat or any other console flight game you've played—it's far, far worse. Visually, it's akin to what any small development team without internal support has been able to do on the PS2 (read: not a whole hell of a lot). Games like this are an argument in support of the idea that only mega companies should be allowed to make games on the PS2—this is what they were talking about when they said only five companies in the world can make games on this lovely 'tool'. You'll see jagged lines, moving textures (didn't know grass migrated) and a bevy of other eyesores if you ever choose to play PNN2, and just be happy that (unlike us), you have that choice.



Velvet File
PlayStation 2
Dazz
Strategy
Reviewed page 27

Front Mission: Ring of Red, Military Madness—strategy games of lore that didn't require extensive FMV or eye candy to get you hooked and kept you coming back for more. Enter Velvet File, from little known developer Daze, which aspires to the higher strategy echelon and doesn't quite pull it off. Battle sequences are cinematic in nature, but unlike RoR's intriguing interactive sequences, skipping the battle sequences becomes an absolute must. Not only is it mind-numbing to watch, it also discourages interaction in any way shape or form other than wanting to not see it any more. This tedious exercise detracts from the overall quality of the game—which looks as though it could've been a winner with a little more TLC.



I was actually surprised by this game, after filing it under Front Mission clone from the get go. Yes, VF is FM with other mods and weaker Mechs, but it actually offers something new. The Mechs can move and shoot and rely on a specific chess board layout to attack (such as diagonally and not in a straight line) which serves to add to the strategic edge this game offers. True, the graphics are pretty weak, and the over-use (again) of motion blur gets aggravating fast, but these are small complaints. Overall, the result is a game that plays more like Romance of the Three Kingdoms (an amazing game), and is certainly worth taking a closer look than ECM apparently did.



Bangai-O
Dreamcast
Conspiracy/Treasure
Shmup
Reviewed page 19

Partial disappointment sums it up nicely. Treasure delivers an amazing 2D free roaming shooter, with impeccable control - on N64. When the DC revision hit in late December 1999, we were met with nearly impossible to see characters (which shows to go that higher resolution doesn't always equate to better gameplay) and horrific control. Fifteen months and 2 publishers later, we now have in the US the same mediocre port, but with all the vastly entertaining (and I mean that sincerely) segues and 'movies' translated into English. I always wondered what Ultraman would tell Godzilla if they were locked in mortal combat—buy the N64 version and the DC version and use the DC to translate your progress on 64.



Good things come to those that wait...and wait...and wait. Bangai-O has been a long time coming with numerous publishing delays set to overcome its stout frame, but is definitely worth the cash. Think old-school Thexder on speed, mixed with a generous heaping of Robotech-style multi-missile attacks and over 40 levels of madcap shooting action. Bangai-O has humorous antics, the choice of 2 characters with different attacks (rebounding lasers vs. missiles) and some amazingly old school level design—definitely worth checking out by the gamer that misses 2D and Treasure...two things that go great together.



Macross M3
Dreamcast
Shoeisha
Spirit Crushing
Reviewed page 38

Few licenses in the annals of gaming history have been as mishandled as Macross, and, I'm happy to report, Macross M3 keeps that fine tradition alive and thriving. At this point, if it's not one of the four good Macross shooters (2 arcade, 1 PCE, 1 SuFami) then you might as well just give up hope. This license is cursed, and it's apparent that this title pretty much copied the exceedingly hurting PS Macross VFX games—bad graphics, no sense of weight to the plane and some truly feeble 'dial a combo' attacks. I thought about ending this with a 'for collector's only' caveat, but even they should spare us from seeing any more of its stretched, abyssal kind. I go now to prepare for the flood of hate mail from the world's Robo, oops, I mean Macross fans, <evil grin>.



Anime licenses have always been exploited but with Macross, it's been a long time since a good one has come out. Sure, some diehard fans will say VF-X 2 wasn't that bad but we all know if it was a standalone game, no would have bothered to look at it. Macross M3 takes a similar approach to the VF-X series and miserably fails. Controlling your valkyrie can be a real pain and the slow transformation sequences take away valuable time from your mission. Macross should be a simple to play and intense experience not some flight sim-like game. Something like Omega Boost which ironically enough has mechs designed by the Macross master himself, Shoji Kawamori, is infinitely better than this drivel. I'll take Macross 7 on Gameboy Color instead of this.



ROLW is one of those rare games that gets better the more you play it. Visually, you get an isometric game (Diablo style) which isn't entirely impressive, but the gameplay and customizable options supercede everything else.



This is the kind of game that has so much depth that you're almost forced to play through it again to see, do, and play every last bit of it and even then you might miss a ton of things. If you've somehow begun to equate the last few FF games with RPG's, step up to the plate and get a hold of a real man's role playing game—even if you are a few month's late.

Here's a game, that when released in Japan, I never could have speculated would've graced these shores with its presence. Here I am thanking Conspiracy for bringing over the little known "Diablo-esque" RPG for the Dreamcast that was highly ignored by Japanese consumers (a la most Dreamcast games in Japan) despite being a strong and, yeah, I'll say it, FUN game. A few will bitch and moan about the camera not always being right, blah blah blah. Bottom line here is that there are very few RPG's of the action-orientated variety released that are any good, and this is one of the few that fit into that category. Strongly recommended for any Dreamcast owner with an ounce of sense.

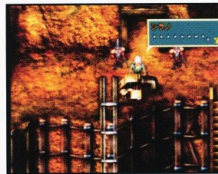


Record of Lodoss War
Dreamcast
Conspiracy/Treasure
Action RPG
Reviewed page 17

I'm all for old school games, but releasing something this visually baref on the DC is just silly. When characters walk, it looks as if you've got 2 animations, which are nothing more than 1 animation reversed. The magic effects are horrid, and everything moves like me after a long night of partying and a long morning of Red Bull and cigs. Needless to say, I couldn't get over the hellishly inappropriate graphics—how is it that Genesis and SNES game from years ago can possibly utterly and completely crush this game? Even the color palette is dead, diffused and washed-out. The music is decent, though, but even that one bright spot is marred by the busted arse mouse without a mouse control.



OK, this is exactly what's wrong with PC ports today, and why I fear, to a large degree, any console that intends to rely heavily upon them. This game is a mess, from the second you boot it up and see the soulless Windows CE screen staring back with vacant eyes and empty heart. RoZ actually is a damn fine looking and playing game on its source platform (J-Win, like Baroque Shooting) but Softmax completely butchered it in the move to DC. Super-long and frequent load times? Check. Pixelated low-res artwork and animation that redefines the word "choppy"? Check. Mouse-based interface that doesn't allow the use of a mouse? Check. Needless to say this is bad port 101 territory—every possible porting and localizing mistake that could be made, was—at least they were thorough...



Rhapsody of Zephyr
Dreamcast
Softmax
RPG
Reviewed page 39

Finally, after a multitude of reissues and re-releases of Sakura Wars and Sakura Wars 2, Sakura Wars 3 hits the Dreamcast in 3 editions (yes, folks, the music box is in the game). The game and experience is a visual feast as well as a testament to production values and finance that few games enjoy. The character art is up to the usual Sakura standards. However, the strategic mech battle sequences (which are few and far between but well worth the effort to get to) are absolutely jaw dropping and nothing short of stunning. Pre-rendered sequences are absolutely like nothing that you've ever seen before. Ever. For those concerned about the high price tag, Sakura is three discs long and guaranteed to keep you busy for quite some time.



I consider red-blooded American males (Kodomo doesn't count, he's a limey) that like "dating sims" to be about as manly as the average Frenchman. Still...there is something oddly compelling about the latest in Sega/Red's Sakura Taisen series. Perhaps it's the fact that it takes place in "gay Paris" (make sure you pronounce "Paris" like a native French-speaker to get the full effect) or that Oogami is meeting a whole new batch of ladies to woo. But no, it's actually because sandwiched between each "dating sim" portion there's some pretty solid strategy game action to be had—just remember, the worse you treat each lady, the better (and harder) the strategy sequences will be. Final Fantasy Tactics, it's not, but fun, it is.

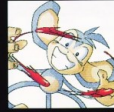


Sakura Taisen 3
Dreamcast
Sega/Red
SLG
Reviewed page 36

Only Sting would think to parlay its characters and imagery from the gothic Saturn RPG into a PC-only arcade-style vertical shooter. Well, maybe Acclaim too, they would cross-plan anything. You can argue for either insane genius or regurgitated pandering—either way you get a damn nice shooter for your hard-earned Y1980. Mildly repetitive encounters and so-so power-ups (then again, aren't most shooters guilty of this?), but a plus in that it resurrects the seldom used art of "life gauge." A fringe benefit, if you can successfully navigate Sting's website, is buried among the links: a set of files to change the character into angelic Linear Cannon, the seldom heard-of heroine from DC Evolution (another fine ESP/Sting/Sega collaboration I might add).



Some have said that the traditional 2D shooter can only survive if it makes in-roads onto the PC platform—specifically J-Win. I don't know if that's necessarily correct, but with games like Baroque Shooting, it'll certainly make it a lot easier to swallow the idea of such a world. The graphics are lovely (nice, sharp and hi-res) and the gameplay is suitably manic, with some heavy-duty power ups and decent transparency effects. On the negative side, it's not the most spectacularly designed shooter with some very lackluster boss encounters and hellishly repetitive backgrounds knocking it down a few notches. Still, it's good to see Sting branching out and taking a chance on something other than a new chapter in the Evolution saga.



Baroque Shooting
J-Win
Sting
Shmup
Reviewed page 41

FEATURE

Stretch Panic.....Playstation 2



Developer: Treasure

Publisher: Conspiracy Games

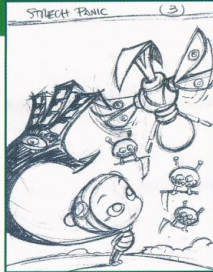
Death of Originality

Some time ago, in another life, I made the argument that games these days didn't feature much in the way of originality anymore—everything that was perceived as 'original' merely built on the back of something older and better and, really, wasn't actually creative or unique except in the most tenuous of ways (e.g., Tomb Raider was nothing more than Prince of Persia in three dimensions—Jordan Mechner deserves more credit for that game than the 'creators' do).

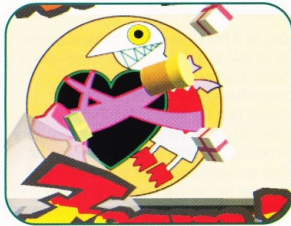
In fact, with the advent of 3D-dedicated consoles (Saturn, PS, N64), you would have figured there'd have been an explosion of new concepts and ideas. Instead, we had a mad dash to re-invent the wheel, except in a few rare cases that I could, at best, count on the fingers of one hand. Games like NIGHTS, Super Mario 64, Blast Corps, Hybrid Heaven, (didn't see that one coming, did ya?) and...uh...hmm—guess I have a finger to spare. Anyone want to guess which one?

With the intro of systems wielding DC/PS2-class power levels, once again, you'd think that we'd get a swath of completely original and innovative ideas that only the planet-shaking force of the new consoles could make possible. <BEEP>, wrong again. Games like Seaman, Kuri Kuri (a.k.a. Cookies and Cream in the US, <gag>), Ridge Racer V (just making sure you're awake), Chu Chu Rocket, and...uh...wow, even more bleak than before...guess that leaves me with two spares—look like it's the double-barreled UK 'V' (not for victory).

But whenever a Treasure game comes along, if nothing else, you can be sure you'll be getting something that's incredibly creative...if not entirely original. After all, many of those games build on the back of previous work dating to their days at Konami (before there was a Treasure). This time, though, they've come up with something so completely inspired, so painfully original, and so utterly playable, that it could very well find itself uttered in the same breath as (some of) the aforementioned classics—big words? Maybe.



Stretch Panic.....Playstation 2



Déjà View

For starters, you may get an unsettling sense of déjà vu after glancing about the page, and supping on the array of screens gathered for your drooling pleasure—looks a lot like just another 3D character-driven platformer, doesn't it?

There's the requisite super-cute character: Linda, the heroine of our story. Only Linda isn't just some helpless au pair; rather she comes replete (I love that word) with a lovely scarf with which to defend herself...a demonically possessed scarf that likes to stretch things, to be exact.

Armed with this devilish device, Linda must make her way through the quaintly named Museum of Agony and save her overly vain sisters from their little nightmare worlds of vanity they've been trapped in—only her sisters aren't very happy to see her. Thus Linda must use a little of the old lead pipe treatment to straighten things out...

Yep, it seems that Linda's cantankerous siblings have become slaves to their own wanton vanity thanks to a mysterious 'benefactor' who promptly imprisoned them within the Museum of Agony to (presumably) make life difficult for Linda...or just to set it up so that there's some form of conflict and therefore something for her to slap down—either way, the whimsical story is presented in a hyper-cute cinema

sequence at the beginning of the game (this game is wacky even by Treasure standards, so be prepared).

The levels in Stretch Panic are set-up a la Alien Soldier: very short 'platform' levels followed up by titanic boss encounters that you're feeble heart may not be ready to handle—have the defib ready just in case (see box-out for more info).

The 'platform' levels are known as EX levels (EX=exterior), and are populated by the Zako—the evil henchmen of the sisters and their demonic 'benefactor'. They're accessed via a hub level (the aforementioned Museum of Agony). Herein you'll earn points needed to unlock the doors and rescue your misguided siblings from themselves.



Stretch Panic.....Playstation 2

Emotional Overload

OK, so if there's one thing Treasure seems to be able to do, it's push hardware—we're talkin' boulder rollin' of Sisyphusian proportions (only they actually get the sucker over the hill...and up Everest). They did it with the SNES (before they were Treasure) in *Contra III* and *Castlevania IV*; they worked miracles on the Genesis with *Gunstar Heroes*/Alien Soldier et al; and their crowning (graphical) achievement had to be making the 'symphony' of processors in the Saturn sing like a mad banshee for *Radiant Silvergun*. Hell, I bet these guys could get blood from a stone if the occasion called for it.

Anyway, now that it's come time for them to really tackle the Emotion Engine (and its partner in crime, the Graphics Synthesizer), need we, for even one scant moment, question their ability to get the most from this expertly designed piece of hardware? A piece of hardware that's brought some of the most powerful, most well funded development powerhouses in existence to their knees (I think Square is bleeding profusely from most of its orifices)? Well, maybe a little.

Like it or not, Treasure put together the painfully slipshod *Silpheed TLP* for Game Arts. What most people don't know, however, is that they had a mere two months to do the entire game. Sure, that doesn't change the fact that it's a lousy piece of software, but it does show that their technical prowess with the EE and GS should not be based on that one painful piece of work—and now it likely never will be.

See, *Stretch Panic* does a few things that most other PS2 games can only dream about: hardcore real-time deformation everywhere coupled with a resolution that exceeds 640 lines horizontally (and is actually over the 700 lines mark a la Saturn VF2) all the while chucking all sorts of twisted, eye-shattering effects around the screen while screaming along at a milky smooth 60 fps—PS2 as fill rate monster? In Treasure's hands, believe it.



Stretch Panic.....Playstation 2



Kouichi Kimura: Game God

The man behind Stretch Panic is Kouichi Kimura. Name doesn't mean anything to ya? Well it should! Here's a list of his past (and present) credits:

McDonalds Treasure Land Adventure: director & main designer

Dynamite Headdy: director and main designer

Guardian Heroes: designer

Silhouette Mirage: director & main designer

Bangai-O: designer

Stretch Panic: director

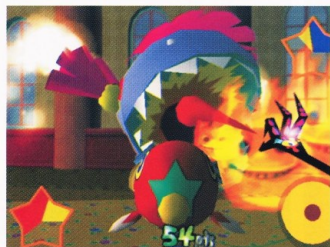
Impressive, eh? Now if only he'd give us a sequel to Dynamite Headdy (my own personal favorite Treasure game), all would be right in the world.

Made In America?

Not exactly. But as of this writing, Stretch Panic is only coming to the US and Europe—there is no Japanese release planned. So for those of you holding out for an import release (for better box art, or you're too otaku for real life—Shou, for example) you best cancel that date with destiny for now and jump all over the US release (between you and me, though, I bet Shou-sama buys the Euro edition just to be different).

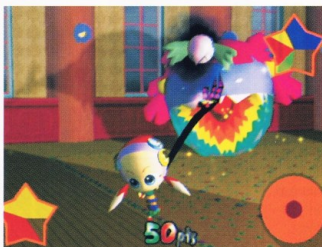
Sisterly Love

The level structure in SP isn't set up like your typical games: instead you're treated to very short 'platforming' levels followed up by increasingly difficult boss battles (which are the meat of the game). For your delectation, we have some info on a few of the siren-like sisters (the bosses) listed below:



Anne Droid

The nifty thing about Anne Droid and her level is that the no-holds-barred battle takes place on a super-small planetoid—you can circumnavigate the globe in about 10 seconds while dodging electrodes and Anne Droid herself orbiting 30 feet from the surface.



Cinder

Cinder has a thing for fire—the kind to better roast Linda with. This big-headed mutant has some really nasty, flammable breath and has every intention of lighting her little sister up with it. Thankfully, Linda can take a swing on her uvula (that hanging thing in the back of your throat) and give Cinder a nasty tonsillectomy.



Fay Soff

Fay has to be one of the most original bosses ever. I'm sure you all remember owning a Mr. Potato Head when you were a kid, right? Well, when you snap Fay's face, her eyes, ears, nose and mouth drop off and you must reassemble them in an ugly, contorted manner upon the blank canvass that is now her face—she gets so humiliated by how she looks, she takes damage.



Stretch Panic.....Playstation 2



Snapstastic!

Look back a page: note where I stated 'hardcore, real-time, deformation'—this is what sets *Stretch Panic* apart, gameplay-wise, from all other games before it. This one 'effect' taken to an over-the-top extreme is the key to unlocking all the rampant originality and painfully addicting gameplay nestled inside each groove of this PS2 DVD ROM disc.

Unlike other action game characters, Linda doesn't jump on anybody's head—besides being painfully run-of-the-mill, it's also very un-lady like. No, Linda has access to her previously mentioned muffler (or scarf, if you prefer)...one with a serious attitude problem.

Now imagine you're cradling the oddly light Dual Shock 2 pad in your hands: one stick controls Linda's movement and the other stick—oh the other stick!—controls Linda's scarf with attitude (it's a bit tricky at first, but ten minutes in you're golden): this is where it gets interesting.

For starters, you don't punch your enemies with the claw-shaped scarf—oh no, that'd be far too typical for Treasure. No, you grab an enemy (or the background—it doesn't matter!) and pull; that's right, pull. Yank left, right, up, down, hard or soft on the analog and the unfortunate foe stretches in just that way—the harder you pull the further they get stretched. And when you let go, well, that's where the pain (for them) starts.

That's not the only means of striking fear into the hearts of your unworthy adversaries: grab hold of an enemy and go Mario Party on the right analog stick and Linda will launch herself at a rascalion, delivering a dizzying head butt which, naturally, causes a great deal more death and destruction.

And that's the rub: EVERYTHING can be pulled and stretched in any direction. The small enemies; the massive bosses; the backgrounds (you jump by using the ground as a slingshot) and everything in-between—it's utter madness when you dial the control and supremely addicting...more than likely because you've never played anything like this before.

By way of resounding endorsement, the day after I got done playing SP for hours on end (this game is designed to be beaten in one sitting a la old school 16-bit games) I had to call Conspiracy back and tell them to send me a ROM ASAP—I had to play it some more. Hell, I'm getting the shakes while typing this...must...play...more...<explodes>.

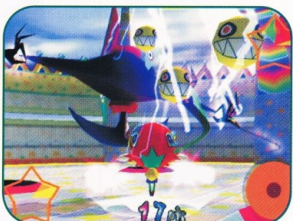
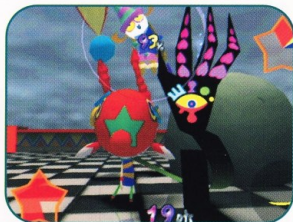
So there you have it: the reason to buy a PS2, so no more excuses—believe me, I was tired of

coming up with them myself: "nah, the system is too tall...makes me feel insufficient. I'll wait till the down-sized version comes out."

It does the old heart well that in a world of completely lacking innovation and originality you can count on one developer to keep the fires burning. Oh, and let's not forget to thank Conspiracy for anteing up to make sure we see games like this—the next Capcom? Oh, I'd say so...

—ECM

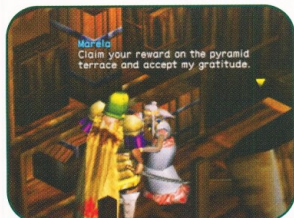
P.S. Oh, one last thing: did I mention the super-bomb attack and the secret to getting the best ending? No? My mistake...



Record of Lodoss War ...Dreamcast

Developer: Neverland Entertainment Company

Publisher: Conspiracy Games



Fashionably Late

Never let it be said that we'd let the downtime some of us recently experienced spare you, the reader, from basking in our opinion on games who's times may have already passed. But since it's too early to retro these puppies, you get to pretend with us that Record of Lodoss War and Bangaio are just now coming to shelves, and why you'd be a buffoon if you let either of these gems slide by the wayside, instead of embracing them with an open, eager heart.

Diablo 3?

Even if you're not altogether familiar with Conspiracy Games/Neverland Entertainment's Record of Lodoss War, you've probably already been inundated with idiocy like 'it's a shallow version of Diablo 2' or it's a 'Diablo clone through and through' (quotes have been altered to protect the guilty)—both of which are so horribly and hellishly misleading as to elicit gasps of pain and rage every time I happen to read them in print or electronic form (and believe me, I could fill a book with such inane quotes). The fact of the matter is that Record of Lodoss War, while superficially resembling Diablo 2, is not only way beyond the ken of that game, but it also happens to be one of the best Dreamcast games ever produced.

Not that I'd blame some for their utterly asinine stance—after all, if I had only played the game for 30-60 minutes, I might come away with the same opinion...but persevere and you'll be rewarded with one of the deepest and most complex experiences available on any platform.

Now I could spend this entire 'late to the party' review noting the differences between this game and Diablo 2, but that'd be like spending my allotted space noting the differences between any isometric action adventure and RoLW—which is to say, besides sharing a similar graphical style and camera set-up, they're as different as night and day, and this, my friends, is a very good thing.

RoLW is a straightforward, old school, classic action RPG—something on the order of Secret of Mana...sort of. Whatever you do, though, don't let the words 'straight-forward' and 'old school' fool you into thinking this means that it isn't a shockingly deep and playable experience. The best action RPG of all time? Read on...

Mouse Clickers Need Not Apply

Whereas Diablo and its ilk had you controlling the onscreen action via a point and click interface (for the terminally reflex deficient), RoLW requires deft control pad maneuvering and the utilization of each and every button on the DC pad to accomplish a myriad of mighty and magical actions and attacks. At first it's rather daunting—after all, how many console games do you know of that utilize 7 individual buttons in concert along with 2 control pads to garner the most from the experience? Not too many (outside of hacked-up PC ports), right? Well, that's just the start.

Armor All

If there is one innovation in RoLW that raises it high above all other of its ilk, it's the ultimate customizability of it all. Your character can

Record of Lodoss War ...Dreamcast

be decked out in the most staggering array of combat gear this side of Diablo 2 (must be why it's a "Diablo clone")—swords, axes, pole arms, suits of armor, helmets, spears, etc., etc. The sheer amount of heavy metal you can attach to your person rules out any chance of anemia for you or anyone else even remotely attached to this game.

And while the mountains of defensive and offensive accoutrements are indeed impressive, it's when you begin to customize everything that the game truly comes into its own.

Sing Me A Rune

By forging various and sundry runes scattered throughout the game onto your weapons and armor, you can make the mundane the magnificent. Sword not dealing enough damage 'gainst the undead? Why go ahead and engrave a rune with greater efficacy against the rotting hordes, freshly risen from their shallow graves. Get knocked down too easily because your foes are too strong? Add a rune to stabilize your step so you can take stronger blows without staggering. Moving along at a plodding pace? Engrave a rune of swiftness upon your boots and double your running speed in one fell swoop.

These are but a meager handful of the runes you can acquire. On top of that, you can upgrade each rune a set number of times by the amount of mythril you have on hand, a magical ore that allows you to upgrade your gear till you're an unstoppable killing machine. And to add to the mix, each weapon has a set number of slots to which runes can be inscribed so you're quest isn't over till you can load up a weapon with exactly the right number of runes you want.

And if that's not enough, there is an element to the strategic in what weapons, armor and runes you utilize: since you'll have far more runes than slots available to use them all, choose, choose, but choose (very) wisely.

Some Enchanted Evening

If the customization of the runes isn't enough, wait till you get a load of the über-intricate magic system. It's not enough that Neverland gave you the ability to memorize spells by doing button combos, to add to your repertoire, but they went the full nine and allow you to combo spells!

Say, for example, you master the cage spell and you've also mastered the 'burn 'em alive spell' (my name, mind you): For someone like me it's not enough that you can just lock your foes down and slap them silly with your sword—oh no...I have to be able to light them on fire while they're trapped in the cage. Sadistic? Yes. Effective? What do you think...

And that's only one example! This game is so intricate in its various gameplay systems it's not enough that you play through the game just once

to experience it all, which is not something you can say about 95%+ of the RPGs out there of any type—You just don't play RoLW, you experience it.

Not Model Material

If there's one thing above all others that made the 'it's Diablo' crowd think thusly, it's the graphics. This game looks just like Diablo 2—if Diablo 2 was fully 3D modeled, rotatable, and jammed with trillions of sprites on screen at once. Oh, and let us not forget the startling spell effects and spell combos. Sure, the game may not look incredible from screenshots (it isn't the most beautiful game by any stretch) but what's there gets the job done—I'd imagine a Lodoss War 2 (hint, hint) would look stunning, however.

The End... Already?!

Sadly I'm way out of space, so I haven't even touched on certain other aspects: how the game ties in directly to the anime upon which it's based; the color selection of and weaponry; your loyal goblin horde that will literally die if you tell them to and above all else, the incredibly well-written story as a whole, riddled with drama and well-placed humor (certain people could learn a thing or two, let me tell ya). Needless to say, RoLW has it all. If there's one game you need to buy this year (thus far) it's this game. If we were still handing out scores, you might even say it's in the triple digits...



Bangai-O

Dreamcast

A Short (get it) Look at Bangai-O

Since I way overran my allotment of words on RoLW, here's the condensed 'why you should buy Bangai-O in a nutshell' rant.

First off, it's 2D and if there's one thing the gaming world (beyond GBA) needs, it's 2D games. Remember when games controlled nearly utterly perfectly? Back before a game required as much freedom as your average American enjoys to get the green light to go into production—"what, you can't move in the x y and z axis? Forgeddabout it." Nowadays these games are none to common, and as a result, the general knee jerk response is to immediately condemn it as old fashioned and out of date. Hell, I almost vomited when I read a recent PS Metal Slug X review wherein they complained that the game 'didn't take advantage of the 3D hardware'—oh really? And when was the last time you saw the PS do the things MSX makes it do, hmmm?

Anyway, I digress...the point is Bangai-O is an utterly playable,



hilariously written (yes, a well-written shooter) game that deserves a slot in your DC collection by these virtues alone.

Forget the fact that your support for Bangai-O would also signal to Conspiracy that you want more and will pay for it. Also forget the fact that it'll fetch a handsome sum in 6 months when people are dying for DC software based on how collectible it is (Bangai-O, like RoLW, was produced to the tune of a mere 10K copies). No, forget all that and just buy the game because it's fun—after all, that's why some of you still play games, right?



GAMEGO!

THE RACE IS ON:

Name the Console Contest

GRAND PRIZE:

YOUR VERY OWN _____ CONSOLE (pictured on page 65)

1ST PRIZE: Limited Edition Phantom-1 Converter

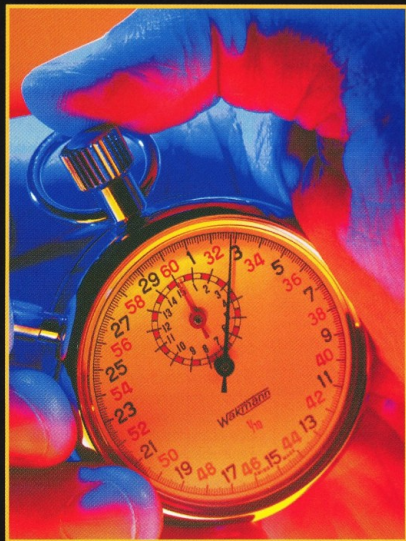
2ND PRIZE: MVS Samurai Shodown I-IV with color labels, mini marquee, & box.

The console pictured on page 65 needs a name. This is where you, the faithful GameGO! reader, comes in:

Come up with the winning name for this 24-bit beastie and you get one...for free. Plus, you can put it on your resume. Probably won't get you anywhere, but it'd look spiffy.

Rules & Regulations:

- 1.) 1 submission per subscriber (and you MUST be a subscriber to GameGO! Magazine)
- 2.) Submissions can be sent to contest@gamegomagazine.com or by snail mail to: GameGO! Magazine • 54 Clinton Street • Center Moriches NY 11934
- 3.) Winner will be chosen prior to publication of GameGO! Volume 1 Issue 2.
- 4.) All submissions become the property of GameGO! Magazine and Video Game Depot and can not be returned.



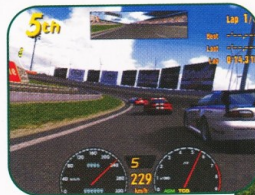
Gran Turismo 3Playstation 2

Developer: Sony Publisher: Sony

Reluctantly Crouched at the Starting Line...

And, damn, if Sony hasn't been at that starting line for some time. Sony's 1st party developers need a hit worse than Robert Downy Jr. on...well, any given day and the sheer amount of time passed and delays accrued by the PS2 version of Gran Turismo are staggering. Yes, at one time it was to be a launch title (under the name Gran Turismo 2000), but a lackluster showing at E3 2000 and delay, after delay, after delay, got some to thinking that maybe even Sony couldn't develop for the PS2.

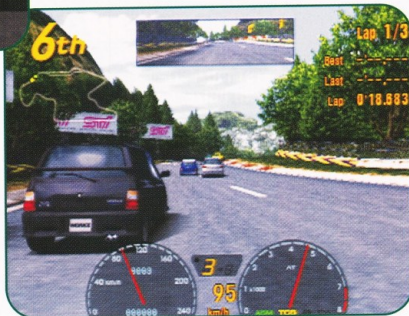
Well, all the graphical tarts out there will be happy to know that GT3 is the best looking console racing game ever. It drops the hammer, pushes the visual revs to the red line and passes every other console game like a F1 car past an old lady with a walker. It certainly isn't Super GT-class graphics, more akin to Rave Racer with slight flickering and aliased lines (it isn't quite perfect). Reflection mapping of objects is constant, and the lighting (noticeable on the forest stages) is simply manic. Watch the replays closely enough and you'll see the disc brakes heating up under stress.



Fresh Off the Showroom Floor

The first thing that you'll notice is the 10,000 polygon per car models that reportedly took about 2 weeks each to create (rendering time on a workstation). Each one is the real thing (save for the conspicuous Porsche RUF's),

complete with all the markings, all the nuances and even the previously noted brake discs. From the lowly mini-cooper and standard Civic to the NSX and the Dodge Viper, every one is amazing to look at, especially when the physics engine shows them pitching



and yawing, diving through turns. The backgrounds have also undergone a massive upgrade, with all the buildings (including Sony's Tokyo offices) looking amazing, be they stadiums or other structures that make up the landscape. Race Laguna Seca, and you'll see everything that the real track has, right down to the massive hills and the advertisements that abound.

The only problem is that GT3 would be more accurately called GT 2 Hyper Mega Turbo Edition—it's not quite as new as you might think. Many of the same criticisms that were said of GT2

Gran Turismo 3Playstation 2



still hold true, they've simply dropped to second place thanks to the new graphics. I count 3 new tracks, with the rest all coming from GT or GT2. In the Gran Turismo mode, you'll race each one over and over again (forward and reverse) and it gets a little old. Were it not for a few rally courses (which force you to charge for 1st place and avoid the generous heapings of dirt that the other car kicks up), all that you'd be doing is upgrading your car from a low-level Honda, to a race tuned Honda, to a racing Honda, etc. Also, the 'bump and grind' is still in full effect, allowing you to charge too fast into any given corner and bounce off a computer car at a favorable angle (and don't bother dreaming for any visible car damage—there's none to be had).

There are a few notable new things, such as the inclusion of a full screen I-Link mode for up to 6 people (and 6 PS2's/copies of GT3 as Sony fiendishly rubs their collective hands together) is great, and will definitely add to the action, provided you can fit 6 TV's in any given place. Combine that with a few F1 cars thrown in and the nothing short of stunning races in the rain, and it's slightly better gameplay-wise than GT2.

That said, is GT3 worth a purchase when it's little more than GT2 on PS2? Good God, yes. Polyphony has tuned this console racer to a 1,000+ HP Nissan Skyline R34-GTR and it's ready to crush anything that gets in the way. It's going for distance and it's going for speed, but there's simply no way GT3 is going to be alone in its time of need...

Now if you'll excuse me, my race tuned Evolution VI Tommy Makinen Edition needs some attention.

—Kodomo



Monster Farm 3.....Playstation 2

Developer: Tecmo

Publisher: Tecmo

I'm a Monster Rancher (sung to the tune of "I'm a Girl Watcher")

If a game's value is measured by the number of hours spent on it, then there are few games that are more valuable than the Monster Farm (Monster Rancher for those not on the importing side of the fence) series—I've spent untold, Phantasy Star Online-like, hours playing this series of games since the first installment in '97.

When I heard that the 3rd chapter was to go to PS2, I was both excited and apprehensive. After all, this was Monster Farm, something that's exceedingly difficult to screw up (ignore the card game and that hop about thing), though that hasn't stopped other developers from mangling series I once had fond memories for.

A Rancher Without A Ranch?!

Just because this is Monster Rancher, though, that hasn't meant that Tecmo has left things parked firmly on keeping the status quo. They've made a large number of adjustments (some subtle, some not) to the game at large.

For starters, the ranch is gone, replaced by more naturalistic settings such as a massive tree, a desert oasis and even a setting 'unda da sea' (sorry, that won't happen again). It's kinda' nice to see them do something a bit different, but it's unfortunate that they did away with the concept of expanding the ranch as you meet with more success. Now you simply unlock each new area as you progress in fighting classes, which give you access to more (and better) training techniques—I would have preferred a massive polygonal castle at some point, but to no avail.

Combat has also seen some subtle tweaks, such as how the game goes 'cinematic' (i.e. it letterboxes the action) when you initiate an attack. It's neat...at first. Sadly, it robs the game of some sense of control and interaction as it offsets and isolates each attack from the battle at large—each attack doesn't feel as much a part of a seamless whole.

Another deletion comes in the area of errantry: instead of sending your monster out for schooling (as in the first two chapters) you now earn better training abilities as you advance through the classes. You also only gain new attacks via meetings with giant monsters hidden throughout the various 'levels.' No more learning them randomly via errantry.

One very nice addition is the ability to actually take control of your critter directly twice a year to go on a scavenger hunt about the premises. While rootin' about the various locales, you'll find hidden treasures that will boost stats, crank up your attack powers and generally break up the regular training day. Once in a while you'll



even come across a random monster (apparently living inside a small flower) and do battle then and there—so make sure your monster is good to go...or it could be off to the hospital.

As if raising your monster isn't enough, now your trainer has a happiness bar as well—like I don't have enough trouble keeping my girlfriend happy, now I have to worry about my virtual trainer getting mad at me for ignoring her when it

Everything Old is New Again

But for everything they changed or tweaked, there's a bunch of stuff they didn't muck with, from the actual monster-rearing to the freeze 'em and store 'em for later use gameplay.

As with all Monster Rancher titles you can randomly generate monsters off of CD's in your collection. Now that PS2 with its DVD drive is here, you can pull them off your movie collection as well (I knew I'd eventually get some use from that 'feature').



Monster Farm 3Playstation 2

Five Questions With the Waffle Formerly Known as Eggo

GameGO! recently tracked down the editor formerly known as Eggo (a.k.a. George Ngo), now firmly ensconced in his new role of Tecmo PR king pooba, and cornered him for some 'Five Questions' action:

1. Who's behind the Monster Rancher franchise?

Toru Kurakata heads up the Monster Farm team, which is made up of approximately 50 people.

2. How popular is Monster Rancher in Japan? The States?

Monster Farm is very popular in Japan, as the first two games have sold almost 2,000,000 copies combined. Unfortunately, in the U.S., the series hasn't enjoyed the same recognition as Japan. I suspect it has something to do with a certain yellow horned menace and the dreaded Kool Aid. Kids, don't drink the Kool Aid!

3. Are we going to see Monster Rancher on other platforms?

Game Cube, Xbox, GBA?

There is a Monster Rancher game coming to Game Boy Advance. The release date is this summer for the U.S., where the game will initially debut. You'll be happy to hear it plays a lot like Monster Rancher 2. Only now you can take your ranching on the road with you. The developers are still adding new features and ideas to it as we speak. As for Game Cube and Xbox, anything is possible.

4. MR isn't exactly known as a core gamer title, so why should they play Monster Rancher?

You've experienced firsthand how fun and unique this series is. The depth and replay value is incredible. When you look at everything from the CD monster generation to the many tournaments you fight through, quests to explore, and countless hours spent raising your monster... I don't think there's a game out there that can compete with Monster Rancher's diversity, and there's few that offer as much replay value. Besides, other than a landfill or a drink coaster, where else can you make good use of your sister's Ricky Martin CD?

5. Mocchi vs. Pikachu to the death: who walks away standing and why?

I was there to witness the first epic battle between these two, and let me tell you, it wasn't pretty. When you get two pint-sized protagonists duking it out for snugly supremacy... anything goes. At the end of the day, there was no clear-cut winner. Although that only adds to the excitement for the Don King-promoted rematch: Mocchi Pikachu 2!!!



PLAYSTATION 2

PREVIEWED BY:



GITAROOMAN

Developer: Koei	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Koei	Available: Now



ECM's Note: We interrupt what was supposed to be a page on Devil May Cry, to bring you this last minute addition—besides, haven't you seen enough DMC already? No? Well neither have I but we figured that you'd rather see something new, so sue us.

I've Got Rhythm

OK, no, I don't. In fact, here's a short list of (very short—there are many more) things that have more rhythm than your friendly neighborhood EIC:

- Driveway Gravel
- A PC-FX (with copy of Battle Heat)
- That Gopher guy from The Love Boat
- People with no limbs
- Not Shou-Sama

That being said, I have just played what could turn out to be the best PS2 game yet: Koei's Gitarooman—a rhythm action game along the lines of Enix' Bust A Move (Bust A Groove in the US), only wackier by a factor of ten.

How ECM Got His Groove Back

Now...how to explain exactly how this game works...um...hmm...OK, how about this: you're Gitarooman, musical virtuoso and superhero out to save the world from the insidious machinations of an alien race determined to end life as we know it. Naturally, Gitarooman and his canine companion, Puma, can't allow this.

The gameplay itself consists of steering the analog stick along a line as it's drawn across the screen with various 'beat points' on the line. Striking any of the four main controller buttons on one of these 'beat points' and holding it down till the next one comes along makes Gitarooman strum his guitar and elicit some killer licks. Naturally, depending on the tune, these 'beat points' can come at machine gun-like velocities and is, of course, where your natural rhythm becomes apparent (or, in my case, lack

thereof). All the while, the line you're tracing is doubling back on itself and doing loop the loops, so you need to have more than just rhythm to keep up.

It may sound fairly simplistic, but once you get your 'groove on' and in sync with the tunes, you'll be having a blast. I needn't explain this to the Bust A Groove crowd, but the rest of you weaned on DDR need to check this out.



The tunes themselves are rockin': a far cry from the wretched songs in the second Bust A Groove, and right up there with the Avex Tracks-produced ditties in the first BAG—the full game isn't due out till July and I already have the soundtrack penciled in for a 'buy.

On My Knees (pads optional)

Pray that Koei USA deigns to bring this game Stateside (if they don't, I need to have me a little talk with them, lead pipe in hand). Of course there's always the import route and I sure as hell will not be waiting—barring the twisted odds of seeing this game simultaneously released both in Japan and abroad.

—ECM



REVIEWED BY



PLAYSTATION 2

EXTERMINATION

Developer: Deep Space	# of Players: 1
Publisher: SCEI	Available: Now

I've seen these dogs somewhere before...

With all of the clones that have been coming out since the first BIOHAZARD, this so called "survival horror" genre has become tiresome. It's almost always the same formula of hording weapons and healing items until the end and then letting loose on the final boss. Sure, it was fun the first few times but how many times can gamers take this? Obviously, quite a few...

Deep Space's Extermination attempts to stray from the typical Bio format by losing the clunky control and expanding upon the number of maneuvers that your alter-ego Dennis can perform. An evade similar to what was seen in Bio 3 allows you to move past enemies without taking damage and your character can actually jump unlike the "elite" members of S.T.A.R.S. Your main weapons are the ever-present knife and a rifle with grievous amounts of attachable components. There are several scopes that allow you to live out your Golgo 13 fantasy and pick off enemies from afar. Basic ammo is plentiful and the risk of dying is fairly low—so how is this suppose to be scary?

Not once did I feel anxious or jump in surprise. In fact, there are no startling scenes at all! The only thing that did shock me was the lack of inane puzzles. You know, ones that involve finding a jewel in the vase and taking it to the nuclear warhead to get the special lucky dog medallion. Everything is pretty much set out logically here except for the items scattered about the shafts. How exactly do the bullets and health packets get up there? The bullet fairy?

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and an easy way to make a quick buck

Despite the complete lack of creativity, Extermination is decent. There's nothing really wrong with the execution except for the rather rudimentary platform parts and the inability to move the camera around which can lead to accidental deaths. It does, however, feel rushed. Later on in the game, you obtain several items right before the game ends that have no real use—and what's with the dog tags that apparently do not affect the game at all? I assume Sony was hurting so bad for cash flow that they had to let this one go early but what could have been a very good title ends up being rather average.

—Shou-sama



PLAYSTATION 2

REVIEWED BY:



PAIROTTO NI NARU 2 (LET'S BE A PILOT)

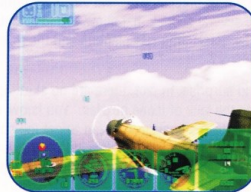
Developer: Beluga Computer	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Victor Interactive	Available: Now

If you want to learn how to make a Kodomo cry, hand it a console sim and wait for the evil satisfaction that comes as sustained boredom kicks in. While Gran Turismo and the occasional con sim has risen above the disturbingly low average (my brother still bogsarts the DC rev of Panzer Front to this day...), most are on par with a swift kick in the nads. And paying upwards of 70 dollars for the pleasure...umm, how 'bout 'no'?

Pairotto Ni Naru 2 (Let's be a Pilot 2) is a straight up pilot simulation game. After choosing between prop or jet powered planes, you must pass a series of training tests and then move on to either Commercial or Military specialization. Each combination yields different planes (ranging from WWII era planes to the latest jet fighters and transports). Commercial simply focuses on instrumentation to thread that C-120 cargo plane between endless amounts of buildings. Military specialization will give you the option of doing several missions against air, sea, and land-based opponents, but doesn't succeed in offering anything new or better than comparable titles.

For starters, it's damn hard to get into any simulation game when the graphics look as bland as tofu. Taxi along the runway and you'll see the virtual painted lines shake like a belly dancer. Look around at the topography when flying, and you'll actually see the point at which the polygonal landmasses connect, jutting up at unnatural angles, in true suspension of disbelief killing-style. The water, which makes up a vast majority of the island scenery, looks akin to a pancake with zero depth. Well, at least you can't land on the water...

...Or can I? I did that very thing in a fit of boredom that drove me to the gates of madness. While the physics seem realistic, and accentuated well by the spot on analog control, you can basically land on any surface that is reasonably horizontal as long as it's not a building. This is good because with the shimmying and, dare I say, shaking buildings, they might be a tough target to hit.

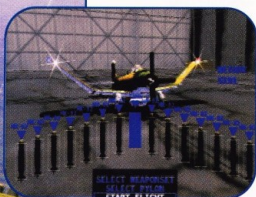


The combat missions aren't without some entertainment, but it didn't take long (after staring at the busted graphics and shooting the same three objects in varying order), before I was ready to kamikaze everything in sight. Add to that the fact that by simply using long-range missiles on jets, you can destroy almost every target before it's even visible. That should give you some grim idea of the 'entertainment' contained within.

With Sony's Sky Odyssey and the Dreamcast's Aero Dancing series already released (plus Namco's upcoming Ace Combat 4 for PS2), there really isn't a single reason to add

PNN2 to your flight sim squadron. Yes, it's probably the best PS2 flight sim that allows you to pilot the Concorde, but that's like saying I'm the best

—Kodomo



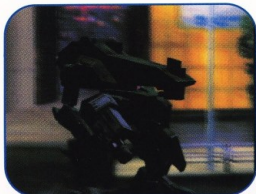
REVIEWED BY:



PLAYSTATION 2

VELVET FILE

Developer: Daze	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Daze	Available: Now



Velvet File

Raise your hand high in the air if you enjoy Square's Front Mission series. OK, good, I can see that most of you know a good game (barring some anomalies) when you see it. Now, raise your hand if you'd like to play a game that is, essentially, Front Mission in nearly every way shape and form: Grid-based strategy combat; giant robot battle suits; all the firepower you can handle; customizable mania and all on PlayStation 2 LONG before Front Mission will make its debut on Sony's black beast. Sounds good, doesn't it? Well, wait till you play it...

ECM: Crushing Expectations Since '97

...Cause that's where the pain begins. Oh, I'm sorry, did I get you all worked up in the first paragraph? Well, sorry people, this is where I let you in on the ugly little truth that VF is a hollow, empty, fifth generation VHS copy (you'd do better trying to decipher porn on scrambled TV) of the Front Mission games. Sure, it's got lots of mechs and lots of strategy but it's a broken down, budget copy in every way.

Pace Maker

OK, for starters, strategy games by their nature are not twitch affairs—they're more deliberate, more thought out endeavors. The thing is, as in all other areas of gaming (and entertainment in general) pacing is excruciatingly important: bad pacing, inevitably, will lead to a bad game. And Velvet File has bad pacing down to an art form (what? Pacing isn't an art? OK, well, a very finely honed craft, then).

First off, the cinema intermissions are of nigh-interminable length. Now my grasp of Japanese is somewhere in the neighborhood of a second grade reading level, but even I can tell you that 25 minutes of cinema sequences before you see a shred of gameplay is a bad thing. I actually put a paperweight (actually, the game box) on the 'O' button to help speed things along, while I read a (well-paced) book.

However, eventually the cinemas do indeed give way to a 'game'—the game apparently involving wading through lots of (you guessed it) cinematic battles between each strategic turn. That's right, like many strat. games before it in



the brave new world of 3D, VF features cinema-style combat. You make a move, the camera zooms into the action (replete with nauseatingly intense motion blur) and you watch the sequence play out from ground level. Thankfully, you can skip these sequences, but you can't directly disable them thereby forcing you to constantly cancel the cinema to get to the horribly shallow strat. sequences—this 'feature' alone nearly ruined Front Mission Second some years ago.

Now don't get me wrong, it's not as if Front Mission 3 required much in the way of actual strategic thinking. The old video game strategy adage applied: surround foe on all sides and administer savage beating till he breaks. The same thinking applies here, only now the system is a bit more complex (unnecessarily, unfortunately) and just succeeds in screwing up what little (yes, you win a prize) pacing there is.

Needless to say Velvet File requires one thing: huge, monstrous, gigantic heaps of patience, something I have in very short supply these days. However, those of you that liked Front Mission and don't mind having as many cinemas/story sequences tossed your way on the order Xenogears might find some enjoyment here. Me? I'm going back to praying WSC Front Mission answers my strategy prayers...

—ECM



PLAYSTATION 2

REVIEWED BY:



ARMORED CORE II ANOTHER AGE

Developer: From Soft	# of Players: 1-2
Publisher: From Soft	Available: Now

Armored Core II: Another Age is a standalone mission disc—now that we have that out of the way, we can continue...

Another Age sports a slightly overhauled version of the AC2 engine, jam-packed with more (and much less linear) missions for your mech warfare enjoyment. Unlike many continuation discs, it does not require the original title (Armored Core II) to work; not even a save game. You are good to go from the first boot up.

The first thing that drew my attention is the easier aiming. I was frustrated to tears after 5 minutes and 2 'game overs' with the original AC2, due to its stiff movement and sluggish aiming system. Even on easy modes you could be torn to pieces on the first mission before managing to maneuver your lumbering behemoth around to find fire. From Software heard the complaints and listened, improving aiming and movement as well as the overall feel of the mech that you're piloting.

AA sports a partial English mode: most of the menu options and voiceover instructions are in the Queen's English, but most text remains Japanese. Not that there is a great deal of reliance on reading in a 'point and fire' mech title, but every bit of directional guidance helps in my opinion as well as making the prospect of importing it that much less daunting for the Japanese deficient.

This incarnation is much more non-linear than its predecessor—after the first mini-kirmish you are free to choose your destiny and head out towards greater bounty/rewards. Or you can continue on in the sector you initially entered. As you progress through missions, you earn rewards. Obviously, the more carnage you bestow upon thine enemies (minus repairs for damage inflicted by enemies, restitution for decimated property, etc) the more filthy lucre you receive for better armor, firepower, and other enhancements.

Overall, this is nothing more than a high-priced 'standalone' append disc sporting lots more missions. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing depends on whether you like your mech shooters or not (and whether you like 'em enough to fork over \$65 for more of a good thing). Armored Core 2 Another Age will certainly satisfy owners of the previous incarnations of the series. You tend to either love AC or not and the latest installment is no different in that regard.

Prognosis: Recommended for the hardcore fans and perhaps those that haven't played the first Playstation 2 Armored Core 2.

—Pokey



PREVIEWED BY:



PLAYSTATION 2

J PHOENIX

Developer: Takara	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Takara	Available: Now



ECM's Note: This game was recently released in Japan as a \$20 "demo". Needless to say we were not amused which is why we're reviewing this "demo"—good games can be \$20 "demos" anytime they want. When they're bad, though...

Gun Griffon Blaze, Armored Core 2, G-Saviour (sic), Mobile Suit Gundam, ZOE, Velvet File: if there's one thing the PS2 has a lot of, it's mech-based games. Pick up a PS2 and shake it vigorously, odds are one will come hurtling out (along with its bum power supply—watch it, those things hurt!). Which, generally speaking, is quite all right with me. See, I love games based around big, hulking, multi-story mechs. Ponder the psychological significance of it all you want (I'm a short man in a tall man's world, etc.), but I'm not sweatin' it. Unless, of course, we get more like J Phoenix, 'courtesy' of Takara—then I'll swear off my quest for greater altitude and reside among the hobbits, a contented (if bitter) man.

But hey, what's not to like? I mean it's got mechs: they're big, and they hulk...and, uh, hell, we're halfway home already, right? Wrong. What we have here is the worlds first fully-featured

Armored Core 2 clone—that is, if you're the type that considers a '72 Dodge Dart a clone of a '00 Diablo.

See, J Phoenix has everything that makes Armored Core 2. Armored Core 2: an email system; a garage to outfit your ride; and even the handy (read, utterly aggravating) look feature—you know, hold the triggers to look up and down instead of the logical second analog stick. All of this and the production values are what you might find in an episode of Minimal (he's a man...and a shark!). Heck, if I closed my eyes and played this game, I doubt I could tell the, uh, hmmm.

I hate to say it, but if they'd given this game to EA, at least it'd look all spiffy and shiny with some great logos, nice menu and option screens, and Pat Summerall handling the play-by-play—but they didn't. They got Benny the janitor to hack the Armored Core 2 engine, Freddy to do some horribly low-budget option screens and packed it with mech designs (badly) ripped off of VOOT—but on the bright side, they certainly got that 'borrowing' thing down.

And the gameplay itself? Take away the sense of weight and girth you'd feel piloting an Armored Core 2 mech (if only Hoahmaru could do the same), and you've got an idea as to exactly how the controls 'feel.' While it's not VOOT fast, it's eerily quick for what's essentially a mech 'sim'. Other than the motion of the bots, though, it's pure Armored Core 2, right down to the control scheme—just badly paced and ugly.

Listen, it all comes down to the fact that they're the same game, except that J Phoenix is the one-eyed, gimp-legged sibling. I mean, if you can have the Diablo why would you opt for the Dart? If you already have Armored Core 2 there is no reason to linger here: move on before the stench of death becomes overpowering. In the meantime, might I suggest a can of Lysol, pine scented?

—ECM



PLAYSTATION 2

REVIEWED BY:



KLONOA 2 LUNATEA'S VEIL

Developer: Namco	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Namco	Available: Now



Another furry creature comes this way...

Back in the 16-bit era, the deluge of mascot platformers turned me off to the genre so when Klonoa 2 came across my desk I was a bit unexcited. How could this game be any different than what has come before it?

As I played through it, I came to a stark realization: The developers must have used some kind of magic to get me to like this black cat with big ears. There's something special here that isn't apparent initially; Klonoa 2 has personality. The cute taunts that can be executed at anytime and all of the cinema sequences really lend character to Namco's mascot and this is what moves it ahead of other titles in this genre.

Anyone who's played the original or the WonderSwan Klonoa will be amazed at the new cinematic look. Gone is the low color sprite from the last outing replaced by a new cel shaded Klonoa in a larger and more detailed 3D world but strangely enough the backgrounds are rendered normally (must be that PS2 RAM limitation). On most levels, the effect looks fine but sometimes Klonoa appears to be floating off the ground which can be a bit disorienting sometimes but the control is spot on. There's not one instance where you'll be moving in one direction and then go in reverse when the camera pans around nor is there any falling into unseen chasms. It feels just like an old school 2D platformer with none of the polygon complications that plague other titles.



Everyone's invited to the party

Namco has done a splendid job of balancing this title for different types of gamers. There are a number of easy 1-ups to be found and a support mode is included where your new friend Popka comes out to aid Klonoa in jumping to higher areas so less skilled gamers will not be frustrated but conversely, there are a number of incentive items for hardcore players to attempt to obtain such as the 150 jewels and doll on each stage. Any platform expert will undoubtedly go for perfect scores on every level to get that complete mark on their save data. I, for one, spent hours collecting all of the gems just to view those special illustrations in Mometto's house so I could close the book on this wonderful experience that only fellow gamers will appreciate.

Sure, this is really more of the same action seen last time but it's certainly rare to see the aesthetics and game play gel together so well and hey, is there really anything else worth playing on your DVD player right now?

—Shou-sama



REVIEWED BY



PLAYSTATION 2

ANGEL PRESENT: THE LEGEND OF MERRILL'S KINGDOM

Developer: Nippon Ichi Software

of Players: 1

Publisher: Nippon Ichi Software

Available: Now

If the description "Musical RPG" doesn't tip you off that Nippon Ichi Software's *Angel Present* is cut from a vastly different cloth than the usual RPG, the opening sequence will drop kick you with that revelation in about 5 seconds. Accompanied by a Bear, a Fairy and a few others, the game's heroine Princess Angel breaks into song and progresses through a quirky musical number that gets funnier every time I watch it. True, it's no South Park Uncle... <few musicals can match that one>, but it's definitely the oddest beginning to one of the strangest RPG's ever.

As a pseudo sequel to *Rhapsody on the PS* (localized last year by Atlus), ANP pushes the PS2 architecture about as high as the mushroom houses that heavily populate the game. Read that to mean you'll get minimally animated 2D sprites (that are miles behind Capcom's *Breath of Fire* series) and nothing beyond a barely average 3D landscape to traipse about.

As you might expect, the battle system is just as strange and unique. Players have 4 lines under their control, and each one of those can hold up to 3 characters. There is a stable of main characters who will join your party after completing specific tasks, but you can also capture most of the monsters that you fight against and add them to your burgeoning ranks. This forces the adoption of a deliberate strategy: certain characters can only be used when in the same line as 'leader characters', but this allows for some Chrono Trigger-esque tandem attacks (though nothing here looks nearly as good as that 16-bit game).

The problem is, ANP suffers from the virtual HIV of RPG games, namely, random battles up the wazoo. It's not wholly uncommon to go through a stretch of the game and encounter a random battle less than 2 seconds after the last. Even with the coolest battle system in the world (this ain't no *Grandia 2* or *Star Ocean 2*, peeps) and an 'auto fight' option, it gets to be a royal pain in the nether regions after only a short while.

As far as the story goes, I have to give a nod to NIS for crafting an above average tale that features quite a few twists and turns, which is fully complimented by a myriad of colorful characters and beasts. Controlling Angel on her quest to help those she comes across (such as a mushroom that's lost it's father), doesn't save this one from average title domain and certainly shouldn't be considered too seriously in light of the upcoming *Popolocrois III*.

OK, so it's not the worst way to spend a weekend or two, but outside of the giddy musical opening (which ECM can't seem to get enough of) there's not much here to sate the appetite of a jaded RPG-playing populace. Do yourself a favor and track down a copy of Sony's recent RPG's, *Me and Satan King* or *Tsugunai* if you want the real deal.

—Kodomo





ME AND SATAN KING

Developer: Sony	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Sony	Available: Now



OK, first things first: this game should be entitled *The Devil and I*, but since the literal translation is more along the lines of *Me and Satan King*, I guess I'll just have to swallow it as-is. Now that that's off my chest, let's all pray to the dark lord now that this game makes its way Stateside (though I'm sure Satan will become 'Mr. Cuddly Bumps' in the

translation). This is

Sony's second major Japanese RPG, following on the heels of the solid *Tsugunai* and preceding the next chapter in the whimsical *Popolocrois* saga.

For starters, the art direction in this game is fantastic: console hardware is nearly powerful enough now to make living, breathing, 3D cartoons, exact in all respects and *MaSK* is a very strong testament to that fact. Thankfully, they didn't resort to cel shading in any fashion, though that's probably because it was in development too early to ape *Jet Set Radio* like countless others have already done—the lens flare of the future? You betcha!

Like most RPG's that I've been compelled to play through in the past 18 months, *MaSK* is not for the doom and gloom/fire and brimstone crowd. In other words, if *Xenogears* is your idea of what an RPG should be you needn't stop and gawk at the pretty pictures for more than a moment or two—this isn't going to be your cup o' tea. However, if you thought *Thousand Arms*, *Grandia* (the first one), and *Rhapsody*'s were a lot more agreeable to your RPG palette, then by all means...

The gameplay itself (outside of the, sadly, very standard RPG party combat) is heavily focused on find 'x' to access 'y'—which is why, when someone tells you to get them this and you bring them that, you won't get anywhere. Access to various portions of each map is built on this concept, so if you don't like running back and forth between the same locales, semi-frequently, stay away.

So what we have here is a very pretty, very whimsical and very well-composed (the score is amazing) RPG that you'll have a lot of difficulty muddling

through if you don't have access to someone that's at least marginally capable with the language. However, if you simply must have it, feel free to email me at ecm@gamegomagazine.com if you get stuck, and I'm sure I can find it in my good graces to help you through it—just don't mistake me for a human FAQ. If we're really lucky, though, we'll see *Me and Mr. Cuddly Bumps Stateside* real soon.

—ECM



Gaijin Protection

If you're in the brave club of gamers that regularly imports Japanese RPG's, you know of what I speak: the nasty tendency of a game to prevent your progress simply by asking for very specific tasks to be completed before you can move on. Obviously, this isn't like buying an import fighting game or shooter, and simply pressing start till you get to some in-game action—you have to know some Japanese to get anywhere.

Turning Japanese

If you're new to the language, might I suggest the following tomes to speed you on your way to fluency (OK, baseline competency) in the Japanese tongue:

- Kana Pic-O-Graphix by Michael Rowley
- Remembering the Hiragana by James W. Heisig
- Remembering the Kana by James W. Heisig, Helmut Morsbach and Kazue Kurebayashi

REVIEWED BY:



DREAMCAST

NET DE TENNIS

Developer: Capcom	# of Players: 1-4
Publisher: Capcom	Available: Now

In the collectors item corner, we present Net De Tennis, a mildly feeble attempt at arcade-ish tennis for the masses on Dreamcast. However we look at this game, we are left with the impression that it's just not enough. Not enough to compete with Power Smash (a.k.a. Virtua Tennis); not enough to compete with Mario Tennis and not enough to stand on its own.

Capcom, synonymous with quality over the many years of their existence (minus some FF Revenge-like aberrations), just seems uninspired with this effort that, eh, "boasts" net play and multiple surfaces on which to view the poorly animated characters that resemble a bad Super Nintendo effort. We won't mention the blue-green hard court that looks like a backdrop for a marine science festival, nor will we point out that the apparent lack of crowds or any other indication that what you're engaged in is remotely real. Characters disappear from view when returning a serve from anywhere at all behind the service line, a trait that not only annoys the player but also serves as a reminder as to how bad this tennis simulation is.



But all of that aside, where the game really leaves its impression is in the game play. You can lob, attack the net, volley, rally, serve and dive. And dive. And dive. You see, the sheer volume of dives in this game makes one feel as if Greg Louganis has come roaring out of retirement. Either that or the players scored it big at a local garage sale with stacks of knee pads for sale—that or they went to Costco and scored on bulk Band-Aids. Okay, it's not that bad, but it happens far too often and is nearly impossible to recover from once the game decides it's time for you to go down.

With Net de Tennis released as a D-Direct title (only in Japan; only via mail order; only to registered Dreamcast owners; only if you turn around three times and offer supplication to the gaming gods), I don't think Capcom put their best foot forward. This is clearly apparent from its inexpensive price tag (¥2800 or ~\$24.00) and relatively quick disappearance from the minds and hearts of most sane Dreamcast owners.

Further, it's best served as a collectors item because of the extreme difficulty in which to score a copy. By no means would I recommend that anyone pursue this on any level other than for placing immediately on your shelf, never to

played or opened or seen again—along with 'gems' such as Zusan Vassar. Fire up the N64 and Mario Tennis or seek the now inexpensive Virtua Tennis for your Dreamcast. Both will provide vast amounts more pleasure and will remind you of what you aren't missing with Net de Tennis.

—Haohmaru



Angelica





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SAKURA TAISEN 3

Developer: Red Company	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Sega	Available: Now

Sakura Taisen is one of those games that desperately needs an introduction to the masses, but not the core gamers that have followed the series since the first game (and subsequent 'side games' like the ST Columns derivative). Never before or since has there been a game that mixes a question and answer simulation, with just a tad of turn-based strategy, to such perfection. Red Company has done a good job of staying true to the heart of the series, choosing the Namco route of refinement rather than taking a totally new direction. But is the 3rd iteration, and potentially the last (ECM's Note: the previous phrase was used mainly for dramatic effect), a fitting swan song or just one game too many?

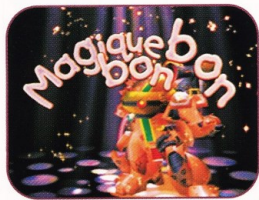
Before answering that tricky question, let's nail down the basics. Like all previous ST games, you step into the shoes of Ichiro Oogami, the roaming journeyman leader of the Kagekidan. The Kagekidan is a strike team (exclusively featuring women and girls), that busts out mechanized robots to fight against whatever evil seems to threaten the general public. This time around, Ichiro begins the game by arriving in 1920's France, to lead an entirely new cast of potentially eligible birds.

I say potentially, because the backbone of the game revolves around Ichiro's interaction, and subsequent attempts to woo them. Interaction with the girls, and a few select supporting characters, is done using a modified LIPS System (Live and Interactive Picture System), which is almost exclusively a timed question and answer session. A girl will ask a question (always written in Kanji) and you have a short amount of time to select an answer that will either make the girl happy, angry or indifferent. Each point change modifies the running total for that girl, and can affect battle performance. Piss off a girl too often and she'll have average battle abilities and you'll be low down on her list of potential boyfriend material at the end of the game.

Beyond that, you've got multiple types of responses, such as using the analog stick to select a level of emotional response, a multi-question 'quiz' with extended time and questions in battle. The sheer amount of options might sound like overkill, but when a game is upwards of 85% simulation, the new additions are more than welcome.

The other 15% (and keep in mind, I'm English so my math is likely quite off...), is turn-based strategy battles, but has also been heavily modified and improved from the previous games. Gone is the checkerboard layout (as in FF Tactics, among others), replaced by a fully rotatable 3D world populated with top-notch graphics. Each mech has a distinctive look (and attack style), and you can now see individual parts move independently. Locations and bosses now come alive, shrugging off the dated graphics of the past, featuring numerous details all in the ST vein. When you see the 2nd boss command a massive gold snake that wraps around





her robotic body, only to dart out and strike your team, you'll know this isn't your 32-bit ST. At the beginning of a turn, both the team you command and opponents have an allotment of movement points. You can do any number of options, until you deplete this gauge. Move across the board and you'll have little left for attack, but move in slowly and you can launch a series of attacks that can be chained together for massive damage (usually at 5 hits). Beyond that, you can do tandem attacks when a team member is close, charge up for a special attack (also charged by taking damage) or heal/guard. The system doesn't have the depth of a Ring of Red or FFT, but looks and plays so damn well that I was mildly distraught when each battle ended.

In short, ST3 is everything that the previous games are, only improved to the nth degree. The story, with the girls working at a local cabaret and troubles caused by a mysterious church, is better than ever. Unfortunately, that's a double-edged sword and all that ST3 goodness does not come without a price: at the minimum, adequate knowledge of the Japanese language is a must. Yes, if you so choose, you can probably plod your way through the game without so much as reading one character of Kanji, but doing so would negate the story's twists and turns.

Some games are meant to be glossed over and a select few fully digested (okay, it's a book quote, sue me), and ST3 wholly falls into the latter category. Considering the chances of a domestic translation are slim at best, bust out that Japanese course and prepare to play one of the best games on the DC.

—Kodomo





MACROSS M3

Developer: Shoeisha	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Shoeisha	Available: Now

And then there was none...

Ahhh, Macross. Has any other popular animated series been as maligned and consistently mangled as that which is known as Robotech in the states? In short, 'no', and I can count on exactly 2 fingers the good Macross games (both of which were shooters), and guess which 2 fingers get aimed at the developers?

Shoeisha's at the helm this time around (do try to forget the words Bandai and VFX if you can) and charged with bringing Macross into the 128-bit era for the first time. At this busted pace, it might just be the last...

Where to begin? Is it the lackluster graphics that feature solid textures but still generate slowdown en masse and massive amounts of 'kryptonite fog'? Perhaps it's the ridiculous physics that give the mechs (which can be switched between Fighter, Gerwalk and Battroid mode on the fly) absolutely no feeling of mass and lumber around at a sulking pace? Or...maybe it's just the fact that it's a bad game.

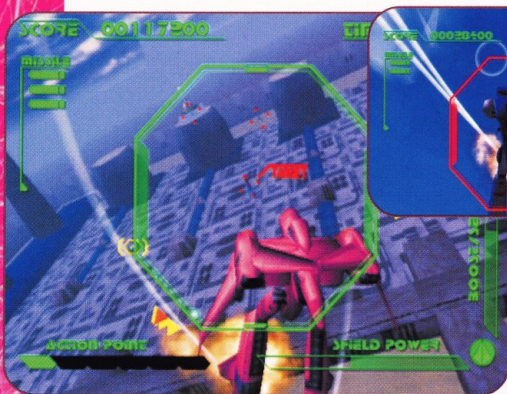
The story itself unfolds with Max and Myria Jenus, fighting a series of battles on different planets. Several years pass between each of the 8 levels and, just a few in, they capture a young Zentradi warrior and of course decide (get ready for this) to adopt and raise her as their own child. Once Moaramia is attained, you can select any one of them to pilot the mech in the ensuing missions.

What you get for your import dollar is a few mechs with mildly varying attributes, supplemented nicely by chargeable special moves plus additional slotted attributes. Each

of the 8 levels are timed and focus on 'kill these ultra special targets' or a race to a pre-determined point, and lack any redeeming value whatsoever. Yes, launching 8 missiles and looking at the trails fly every which way in the sky are cool, but if you like your game to actually have some gameplay, you can move on—there isn't any here..

The kicker is that to truly beat the game, you have to make Moaramia happy, by paying attention to the story and using a certain combination of pilots and mechs. I'll admit it, once I beat the game and saw Moaramia cry, wallowing in despair because I choose poorly, I felt that very same emotion...mainly despair towards my now depleted bank account.

—Kodomo





THE RHAPSODY OF ZEPHYR

Developer: Softmax	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Softmax	Available: Now

Have you ever wondered why you never hear of Chinese or Korean produced games? For the most part, there is a good reason since so many of them are worse than what you'd typically see from Black Ops or Acclaim Studios Salt Lake.



The Rhapsody of Zephyr, is originally a quality Korean PC production by Softmax that went on to do record sales in its homeland, which made Falcom take notice and update it for the Japanese market with a healthy amount of new illustrations. With Softmax's new ambition to become an influence in the Japanese market, they decided to port Zephyr to Dreamcast using Falcom's updated artwork and translated script. Unfortunately,



the developer's newness to the console market is very obvious in this direct Windows port.

There are some extremely basic parts of the Dreamcast version that should not be. By far the largest problem is the lack of mouse support. Using the SLOW cursor with the d-pad is an exercise in frustration. What should be a few seconds of button presses is almost a minute of moving the cursor over the right button and then moving through a long list of spells or items using a scrollbar! Adding to the wasted time is the turtle-like pace your party moves at. There is an option to hold down B to run but really, who's going to move around at the regular speed?!

Then there's the frequent "Loading Now" (that's right, no now loading!) that pops up almost every time you leave a screen. It's not like the sprites have excessive frames of animation nor do the low color backgrounds take up a great deal of RAM. The whole pace of the game is rather slow. Random encounters occur often and the loading that comes with the battles quickly becomes annoying.

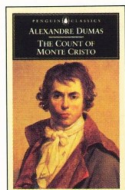
The tactical battle system is a bit typical but the way weapons can weaken and break down creates a need to carry more than 1 weapon which is a different change of pace from other titles—and about the only truly remarkable aspect of this botched port job.

The cast of characters is older and more complex than what you see out of most Square titles and that's probably why this tale of

revenge appeals to me so much. Although, there's more than one instance where you'll wonder who some people are or what their motivation is with no explanation given. I assume this is due to Zephyr being the 5th game in the Genesis series or the sorry translation from Korean which some Japanese gamers have complained about (American gamers aren't the only ones to get badly translated scripts it seems).

Softmax should have commissioned Falcom to translate this PC great to Dreamcast instead of attempting it themselves. A disappointment, but there's always the J-Win version.

—Shou-sama



Historical Significance

Many developers draw on history for inspiration in their games and Softmax is no exception. Zephyr's cast and setting borrows heavily from a literary classic, Alexandre Dumas' Monte Cristo.

Genesis

No, not the Sega console, Genesis is the long running Korean SRPG series that has received praise from all over Asia. Maybe one day they'll cross the ocean...



The War of Genesis
The War of Genesis II
The War of Genesis III
The War of Genesis III
Part 2

The Rhapsody of Zephyr
Tempest





GUWANGE

Developer: Cave	# of Players: 1-2
Publisher: Atlus	Available: Now

Let There Be Light!

Before there was Takumi, there was...Cave. The original bullet-spewing machine, Cave has developed a long line of shooters including the now-legendary DoDonPachi and what I consider the best shooter in recent memory: ESPrade. Cave is also responsible for the upcoming CPS-2 juiced Storm of Progear courtesy of Capcom. But today's topic isn't ESPrade nor is it Storm of Progear (more next issue), no, right now it's the latest in the Elemental Master/Undead Line school of shooter design: Guwange.

Monster Manual

As with ESPrade before it, Guwange puts you in control of your choice of three maniacally powered souls out to wreak havoc in a freakish, nightmare world rooted in Japanese mythology. If you're familiar with Psychic Warlock Taromaru on Saturn, take the basic twisted aesthetic edge and you'll have a pretty good idea of what perverse monstrosities you'll find buried within.

Mythology in Motion

All the graphics are amply animated, and though the game does not run in hi-res, as is the case in Giga Wing 2 (hey, the game is going on 3 years old), it is exquisitely detailed. Everything from the gait of the chosen warrior, to the motion of the largest boss isn't wont for a single extra frame of animation, and the night-utter lack of slowdown will give you very little room to breathe—after all, this is a Cave shmup, and if there's one thing you can be sure of it's little time to stop and admire the—“hey, look...that's neat <BOOM>...oops.”

Sharpen Your Swords

Ah, but the gameplay elements in Guwange aren't simply your run of the mill, shoot-dodge affair: this time out, not only does it take three-hits before you go down screaming in a fountain of steaming ichor, your armaments aren't too shabby either. In addition to wielding a bladed weapon (the basic shot), each warrior can also summon a spirit companion that shells enemies with bombs that will render shots ineffective (and slow) for a few seconds. Your shade can also collect pick-ups scattered throughout the playfield—not to mention that it's impervious to attack. For example,

instead of wading into a legion of enemies hundreds strong, simply fly your doppelganger into the fray, napalm the tangled fray of freaks, nullify enemy shots and collect all the treasure you can while you lay back and reap the rewards. Of course you have to maneuver the shade, and keep yourself alive at the same time, but sometimes discretion is the better part of valor.

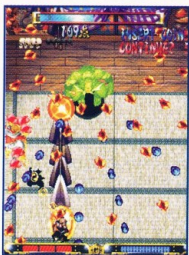
Kicking Back or Sweating Bullets?

The intensity level is very sedate, initially: the first three levels are a cakewalk, even for those of you whose reflexes have atrophied over years of utterly challenge-less gaming. You'll laugh that they gave you three hits and your dead until level 3 concludes—then it's vintage Cave, with a relentless onslaught of sprite-based fauna. And there isn't any reflect laser shenanigans to help you this time...you're getting out of this one on raw skill, so be forewarned (though the handy bomb attack is always there to bail you out, if you feel the need to tap out).

Cave's Demi-God

While Guwange is a good solid shooter, it simply isn't as good as ESPrade, DoDonPachi or even Fever On. The main draw here is the assemblage of mutants and misanthropes—the gameplay is solid but it's not among their best. Still, if you crave some Cave, this will do to till the Storm of Progear makes its debut...soon.

—ECM



REVIEWED BY:



SHMUPS

BAROQUE SHOOTING

Developer: Sting	# of Players: 1
Publisher: Sting	Available: Now

It just doesn't pay to be a console shooter these days: of games released in that storied genre over the past two years, nearly every one has been an unmitigated flop. Sure, Cannon Spike seems to have done respectably, and R-Type Delta sold enough to warrant localization of a sequel that will never come, but they're meager ripples in an otherwise placid, dead calm, sea. People just don't seem to want to blow things up anymore...unless of course they live in the Middle East (<pauses for a moment>, considers the political correctness of the previous statement... and moves on). But, there is apparently one last bastion of hope for the classic scrolling shooter—and it's just about the last place on earth you'd expect to find it: the JWin platform...Japanese PC (!).

And here's the first of what will probably be many covered in GameGO!: Baroque Shooting, based on the creepy, horribly misunderstood, Sting-developed, ESP-published Saturn and PS first-person action RPG—<whew>, how's that for info overload? And you thought Japanese PC games only featured, uh, 'fun bags' (thanks Haohmaru, I think) and lots of tentacularastic action.

BS is based loosely on the console games, at least thematically speaking. While the story is virtually non-existent, all you need to know is that you pilot a naked winged cherub-type through level after level of hi-res shooting action across a swath of well drawn, albeit parallax-free, environs. It's entirely sprite-based, with nary a polygon rearing its ugly vertices anywhere. Everything is beautifully drawn, and to see the game in motion is truly a joy, with some very nice animation (yeah, a well-animated baby's backside—beggars can't be choosers, I suppose) and a rich, but dark, color palette—no dithering here, thank you very much.

The gameplay itself is very no-frills, however—if you're the type of person that just couldn't deal with Gunbird 2 and its fairly straightforward action (heretics), you'll be absolutely bored to tears in Baroque.

Your baby comes armed with (or can pick-up) a fairly standard roster of classic shmup weapons: straight-ahead but powerful shot; weaker-but -wide shot; homing shot, etc. It's certainly not going to be collecting any awards for innovation, but it does play solidly, even with your standard-issue, lousy PC gamepad (thank your lucky stars that Xbox will not ship with a standard Sidewinder controller, <shudder>).

So there you have it: proof positive that not all Japanese PC titles feature lots of ill-clothed women and/or tentacles protruding from every gaping orifice—and shocker, there'll be more where that came from! So if you need something

to keep your lowly P200 warm, you've got some fast and furious shooting action courtesy of Sting to keep you warm...till next month.

—ECM

Tired of staring at the overly-shiny bottom of your super-cherubic companion? Well, never fear, Linear is here! That's right, Linear Cannon of Evolution fame (or at least notoriety) can be downloaded to replace the default Baroque Baby by Sting's website at: www.sting.co.jp —keep in mind you'll need an LZH file extractor to decompress the files before using here...enjoy!



THE J FILES/FACE TO FACE

FACE TO FACE

For the first installment of J-Files, I thought it would be appropriate to interview T's Music, a team of musicians and sound engineers, who were one of the first to introduce real music to the game world. Never heard of them before? I'm certain if you've been gaming for the last 10 years or so that you have heard one of their soundtracks, such as *Winds of Thunder* (Lords of Thunder in America), *Sapphire*, *Final Fight* CD and the *Sentimental Graffiti* series. Great stuff to say the least. I hope you enjoy what is sure to be the first in a long string of interviews with some of our favorite developers in Japan.

Interview conducted and translated by Shou-sama & RUIN of Team Fanatics with Tomoyuki Hamada, president of T's Music



GO: First of all, on behalf of our whole staff, I would like to thank you for taking the time to do an interview with us.

T's: It's my pleasure.

GENESIS

GO: When did T's Music begin? Did you always want to work in the game industry?

T's: Our company was founded in April 1990 but the focus was not just game music but music in general. Personally, when I was a high school student, I thought about working in the music industry.

GO: Where does the name T's Music come from? How big is T's Music now?

T's: The T in T's Music comes from two of our team members who have the same initials in their names: Tarou Hara and myself, Tomoyuki Hamada. Currently, we have 12 employees and over 10 other writers & musicians who do contract work for us.

GO: What was T's Music's first job in the game industry?

T's: Our first game music contract was for a shooting game on Sega Master System called *Submarine Attack* but, in the end, it was not released and has become a "lost" game.

16 BIT ERA

GO: During the 16-bit era, T's Music wrote a number of soundtracks for various developers. How were you able to attract so many developers to your group?

T's: Actually, at the time, my friends in the music industry were wondering why I chose to do game music. In short, during that period there was almost no one who studied music and went into game music (unlike now) and in that era, software developers did not really care about music. Depending on the situation, planners, programmers and graphicers (a Japanese term that just means people who deal with graphics in various ways) who were into music in their school days became the people who created game music; this was something I often heard then. On the other hand, I think people like myself who came from the music industry created music that sounded professional, which many developers liked.

GO: Many gamers think that the music in today's games lack the feeling that can be heard in games from the 16-bit era. Why do you think they feel that way?

T's: When I think back to that time, the first thing that comes to mind is how difficult it was to transfer real music to game music data. On PC Engine, it was easy since the BGM was played directly from CD but in most other cases, we had to use Assembly to create the BGM data. No matter the hardware, we had to keep trying over and over to find those especially nice sounding tones that would please the ear. People think that there is not enough originality in game music today but I believe that it really is due to the flood of games released now. Around 2 years ago I could feel a lack of originality not only in music but in the games too. I think developers have to change their approach in how visuals and audio are used so I will do my best to not be buried in the mire of today's unoriginal work.

GO: To this day, many long-time gamers think that *Winds of Thunder* has one of the best soundtracks ever. Why do you think people still like it so much?

T's: With *Winds of Thunder*, simply having great music was not enough. I believe with a game such as this one, it was its synergy of high quality music and great game play that made it unforgettable-everyone at T's Music thinks very highly of that production.

GO: Does T's Music own the rights to the soundtracks for *Winds of Thunder* and *Sapphire*? Is it possible to release a soundtrack now?

T's: For those two games, Hudson Soft owns the rights. Of course, if it's possible, I would like to release the soundtracks.

CREATION

GO: When you're creating music what are you thinking of? Where do you get your inspiration?

T's: Generally, what's important for any game is the link between what's happening on the screen & the music and also the story & the music so that one element doesn't overpower another. In

the case of when I create game music, I remind myself of how in many games the music is constantly playing in the background and how after hearing it for a while that it may become tiresome. My inspiration comes from many places but for shooting and action games, I look at the image art and for adventure games, I usually read the scenario. Of course, I not only get inspiration while at work but doing everyday things like when I'm driving or smoking a cigarette right before going to sleep. Inspiration hits at any time.

GO: How do you go about creating music?

T's: Generally, before the idea or inspiration fades, I try to make something out of it right away. For example, at work or at home, I immediately go to the sequencer and try to compose some melody or type it into the word processor. If I'm outside, I just write it down on a piece of paper. After getting the idea, sometimes I keep working it until it's complete, other times I condense it.

GO: Are you ever asked to compose in a certain style? What do you do in that situation?

T's: Of course it happens. In our company, we get a description for each track from the client. At that point, it's difficult to understand what kind of image they want from just words. In one case, we presented a song to the client but it was totally different from what they wanted.

GO: How has creating music for consoles changed with the latest consoles? Is it more difficult?

T's: Our work hasn't really changed, but the current hardware has fewer limitations which gives us more freedom for variations in music. With that freedom, though, there are things we must do and things we need to be careful of so more time is spent in completing one track.

OTHER STUFF

GO: What do you think is your best work to date?

T's: Up to now, I think my best work is Sentimental Graffiti 2 but as for my favorite production it would be Fish Eyes Wild.

GO: Are there any other music composers that you admire?

T's: David Foster, Toshiki Kadomatsu (the song writer for the very popular idols, Miho Nakayama and Akina Nakamori), Bob James, and Ryuichi Sakamoto (composer for Far East of Eden: Ziria and The Last Emperor).

GO: Do you play many video games? What are some of your favorites?

T's: I like games in general but I especially play soccer and baseball titles. As for my favorite games, they would be Final Fantasy V, Nobunaga's Ambition, Play By Play Powerful Pro Baseball, and Let's Make a J League Soccer Club.

GO: Again, on behalf of the staff, I'd like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with us. Is there anything you would like to say to our readers?

T's: I'm glad that many gamers in America still remember our past work fondly and I hope that in the future we will create more memorable music. Please look forward to it.

Growlanser II: The sense of justice (PS2)

From the ruins of Masaya comes Career Soft (the development staff behind the original Langrisser series) which delivered a sterling RPG last year called Growlanser that achieved cult status. With the lack of a Dreamcast dev kit, the default choice for the sequel is obviously PlayStation 2. Although Atlus neglected to bring the first game overseas, maybe this high-powered sequel will have better luck. Petitioners, get to work!



Emblem Saga (PS)

One of the greatest tragedies for American gamers is the lack of any official English of any installment in Intelligent Systems' trend setting Fire Emblem series. The first game pretty much started the Strategy RPG genre and classics such as Shining Force and Langrisser followed in its footsteps. Emblem Saga is not an installment of the famed series but it's easy to think that it is. After all, the same creator is working on this title and no fan could mistake the Pegasus knights for another game. May 24th is the day Japanese gamers will get this likely hit. In the U.S., maybe never...



THE J FILES

Hoshigami: Ruining Blue Earth (PS)

Waiting for that serious Tactics Ogre or Final Fantasy Tactics sequel? Hoshigami, which has been picked up for domestic release by Atlus, is developed by some of the former staff members of Ogre Battle Episode V. Expect the same game system with a bunch of new names. Those Japanese developers sure do love coming up with acronyms for common things, but I digress. This one looks extremely promising and is due sometime soon in Japan.

Bloody Roar 3?!

Gamers in Japan have discovered a debug mode in the console version of

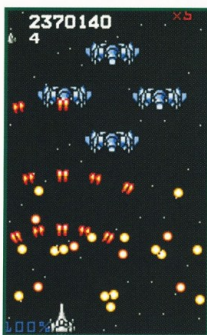


Bloody Roar 3 that allows anyone to manipulate the polygon models used in the game. Let's just say that a picture is worth a thousand words...



WonderWitch Grand Prix

Much like the Yaroze, the WonderWitch is a hobbyist development kit for the WonderSwan which has support for the color model as well. A contest was held at the beginning of the year and the winner of the 500,000 yen prize is the author of an original vertical scrolling shooter called Judgement Silversword that was applauded for not only its technical achievements but also for its balanced gameplay. It's a bit sad to see that the fans can make better software than the so called pros



Magical Harvest is an action RPG that was recently converted to color for the contest and won the Entertainment award. What really surprised the judges and myself is that it features 128 maps but it's only 64KB in size!



R-360 + VOOT?

Seeing how I can count the number of VOOT cabinets in the States on 1 hand minus a few fingers, I think that this one is going to be painful for the serious VOOT players out there. In Sega's Tokyo Joypolis, there are a few cabs of Japan's favorite mech game that you can strap yourself into but there's something different here. Why is there an attendant at all times? Well, this special version actually rotates around as you move

your game persona! As you probably have surmised, the only way to see these in action is to go to the holy land yourself.



THE J FILES/THE GALLERY



彩京 イラストレーションズ



TOKYO GAME SHOW



The 2001 Tokyo Game Show was my first. I've been to E3 and CES before that, but never to the show that game players the world over would sell their family for. The opportunity to go came upon me rather late - I had forgotten that it was coming, until someone pointed out that it was only an hour and a half from where I live. My eyes lit up, and plans were made to attend. Luckily TGS is open to the public, which means I didn't have to pre-register to get in. A translator was lined up, other less worthy plans set aside, and TGS was added to the calendar. Sadly my lot wasn't to be so easy.

We had planned to attend the first day, however my translator was sick. Ditto for the second day, although I was assured the third day was still a go. Fate intervened, and I was faced with the prospect of going to a show by myself. Now, I haven't lived in Japan for long and my Japanese skills could best be described as 'abysmal' (ECM's note: I prefer 'dire'...but to each his own). Making the journey by myself would be a challenging task - but certainly worth the reward!

The easy part was getting to the Tokyo station, but I've been there before and harbored no fear. Once there, my task was made easier by the throngs of people making the same journey I was. Hundreds of fellow game players were travelling the same route - essentially the only route not involving a car and Tokyo traffic. These people are relatively easy to identify, they're somewhat less normal looking than your average Japanese crowd. I was in good company for the rest of the trip!



Once the train arrived at the Makuhari station, the TGS began in earnest.

Never mind the fact that there's a ten minute walk before you reach the UFO-shaped

stadium, Microsoft was there at the station with girls handing out big X-Box bags for filling with whatever was handed to you in the show. That wasn't the end of the Microsoft influence either. They were everywhere!

There was no question of the route to the show - a snaking line of people 20-wide ran the entire way there. Strangely, the sign with a big arrow reading 'foreigner's entrance' pointed to a gate that was staffed with people very surprised to see me, who proceeded to point me toward the other gates. Tip: signs in English should be ignored!



Once I paid my admission fee, I was in. Just like the North American game shows, once you pass through the gates you're in another world. Daylight tranquility is replaced by a dark, cool atmosphere that throbs with lights and beating bass from countless games. Large TVs, big screens and displays that were merely massive were everywhere. Strobe lights, banners, giant inflatable game characters and Microsoft were the order of the day. Everywhere you looked people were carrying massive white X-Box bags, or walking under X-Box signs, or... well, I'll get to that.

Most of the industry regulars were there: Sony, Namco, Konami, Bandai, and a host of others. Nintendo made an appearance, which is unusual for them as they prefer to host their own Space World at a different date, but

they showed only the Game Boy Advance. Curiously Sega wasn't present, although Capcom had a healthy Dreamcast display and there was an anemic little Sega PC stand...



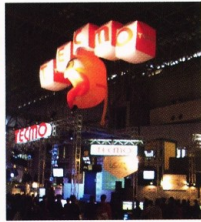
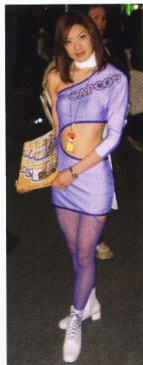
TOKYO GAME SHOW

The big noise at the show was Microsoft's X-Box, without question. Few other companies had anything really new to announce, so instead it was a chance for gamers to play the hottest new stuff without waiting several months for a shot. Keeping in mind I could only base my observations on what I saw and the brochures I was handed, I'll detail here what I made of the show. In no particular order, here's what made an impression on me:



Klonoa 2, (also for PS2) looked very pretty (see review this issue), but I couldn't help shake the feeling that it was Rayman meets Crash Bandicoot, with more character and more attention to detail. Namco is firmly backing the Game Boy Advance, with a 2D-version of Klonoa as well as Mr. Driller 2. Mr. Driller seems to be Namco's Pac Man these days—he was absolutely everywhere in Namco's product literature. He's also seeing release for the PC and Bandai's Wonder Swan Color, although only the GBA gets Mr. Driller 2.

Bandai was making quite a bit of noise with their Wonder Swan Color, which is facing stiffer-than-ever competition from Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Newly announced was a new game called Star Hearts, which looks to be an action RPG featuring the best of Zelda and Ys. Furthering their relationship with Square, Final Fantasy II was shown, featuring the classic game with enhanced graphics. Two other new Square games looked promising: Wild Card, a collectible card game, and Blue Wing Blitz, a kind of cross between Final Fantasy Tactics and Front Mission. Bandai was



First off, everyone's producing content for the Japanese cel phone market. NTT's DoCoMo is the industry leader, and made quite a big deal out of a number of their new devices and software for them. Other Japanese cel phone groups like J-Phone, Oau and KDDI were present as well. Japanese users have been able to send text messages for some time, and more recently could send and receive email to any Internet user from their phone. Color screens have been around for well over a year, but it's only now that the phones have been able to play more than rudimentary web-based games. NTT is bringing their DoCoMo phone technology to the States soon, and we'll be bringing you a more in-depth article on these nifty things soon.

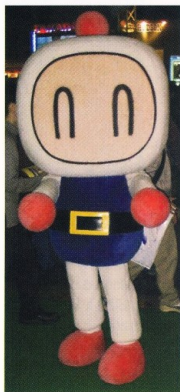
Namco's massive wall of TV's showed only Ace Combat 4 for the PS2, which looks suitably impressive. As expected, the game is a graphically enhanced version of the awesome PlayStation game.

also keen to stress the connectivity of their little portable. They showed how the WSC could be used in conjunction with Smart Media flash memory and additional accessories to function as an MP3 player or GPS. They also showed it connected to their robot toy 'Wonder Borg', for the PlayStation 2, PC, and cel phones. Taking a cue from Nintendo, they also indicated that you could purchase new games or data from convenience store kiosks in the future. The majority of Bandai's other releases are, no surprise, comprised of games licensed from their own library of toys, cards and anime. Doraemon has another new game, and the obligatory SD Gundam and Digimon have new sequels.

Squaresoft would no doubt be offended if we called them a one-game company, however it seems that's what they're in danger of becoming. Final Fantasy X drew massive crowds, as expected, however they had little else to show. A few smaller displays of their

TOKYO GAME SHOW

releases for the Wonder Swan Color, and that was it. Their booth, however, was half-devoted to the line of people waiting to get a chance to play FFX. Given the appalling reviews of their recent PS2 releases, perhaps it is better they stick with what they know. Also their booth babes, while very prettily doing their job and dispensing with the brochures, were decidedly unwilling to be photographed, <grrrr>.



Hudson Soft, also in danger of becoming a one-game production house, brought us a few new Bomberman games. In addition to their recently released PlayStation multi-game Bomberman Land, Bomberman Story was shown for the GBA, and seemed to be a rather schizophrenic mix of RPG and classic Bomberman action. A few other titles were shown: Pinobee and Robot Ponkots 2 along with yet another Peach Boy RPG for the GBA brightened the throng of Japanese-only titles like Mahjong Police, Shogi and Go games. Other than their cel phone lineup, that was it.

Takara was showcasing their newest stuff. The people who brought us

Tohshinden have gone back to the less demanding production of guaranteed-sale licensed mediocrity they're known for. Monopoly, The Game of Life, Brave Saga and yet another ChoroQ game pretty much summed up their Game Boy Color and Advance, PlayStation and PlayStation 2 library.

Koei was on hand, demonstrating how blowing their entire development budget on Kessen 2 can deliver promising results. Kessen 2 for the PS2 was simply amazing. It never failed to impress; from the intro on. Aside from the Jet Set Tony Hawk Cartoon game called Yanya Kabajista (featuring angry teen skater Gawoo) their other titles totally failed to impress. Two more horse racing sims, GI



Jockey 2 and Winning Post 4: Maximum 2001 were shown, and now feature data swapping. Don't expect these Stateside anytime soon. A new warship strategy game in the inimitable Koei style was shown, their new PS2 browser EG Browser was announced, and another me-too music game, no doubt 'hip' and 'irreverent' was shown for the PS2.



Aruze, the company that pretty much swallowed whole our beloved SNK, was proud to announce another in their seemingly endless stream of Pachinko games, and they kind of half-heartedly showed Capcom vs. SNK on a tiny screen off to the side. They were very proud, however, to show off their new Shadow Hearts - and proud they should be! The game seems to be a delightful mix of the ubiquitous Resident Evil with more action and more strategy. Jaw dropping cut scenes and surprisingly well-rendered game graphics ensured that gamers were lined up all day. To be fair however, their small, almost apologetic presence was almost completely forgivable with their inclusion of a group of booth babes that rivaled the best.

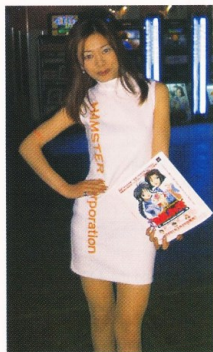
Sony's booth was so huge they included their own map. Not much new was shown, although pretty much everyone was enthralled with Devil May Cry (see this issue). Gran Turismo 3 and no less than 61 other titles made up their show. It would seem that they were more than content to simply show up, be Sony, and show off Devil May Cry. Very few games were new, and most have either been released already or shown in previews months before in Japanese magazines.

Nintendo's booth consisted of their GameBoy Advance lineup, and was enhanced by some very friendly and good-looking ladies demonstrating their apparently revolutionary new music "sound communication system". While it's unclear exactly how this new 'game' was anything more than a .mod tracker for the GBA, it did come with the, er, rather lame hip-mounted speaker, guaranteed to get you killed if you should fire it up in public. Most of the GBA games they showed were simply repeats of what other companies were showing with more enthusiasm elsewhere. I think if Nintendo's going to grace us with their presence, they should at least be enthusiastic about it!

TOKYO GAME SHOW



Capcom and their lovely ladies were making a lot of noise with the stunning and anticipated *Capcom vs. SNK 2*, and seemed to be the only company still carrying the Dreamcast torch. No doubt Sega's buying a lot of drinks for the Capcom guys—they're single-handedly providing all the 3rd party support Sega didn't get from everyone else. Heavy Metal *Geomatrix* was their newest Naomi game, and



seemed to be a *Spawn* sequel in play if not in name. *Gaia Master* was Capcom's new 4-player board game, featuring some cool character design and a new twist on the collectible card game (apparently updated from the earlier PS rev). When Psikyo and Capcom teamed up, we expected great things. *Gunspike* (a.k.a. Cannon Spike) was a great start, and their next game is going to... bore you to tears. A (no doubt) state of the art mahjong simulator featuring characters from the stables of both companies, I forgot to be impressed, and went on to their PS2 lineup, which included the

new *JoJo's Bizarre* adventure, and a Game Arts developed *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*-style game. Oh, and *Devil May Cry*, which was great. Their GBA lineup was impressive: *Rockman*, *Final Fight One*, *Street Fighter 2* and *Breath of Fire*. Game Boy Color had *Gaia Master Duel*, *Street Fighter Alpha*, and *Rockman X2*.

Tecmo was all about three things: The newest cel-shaded (a la *Jet Grind Radio*) *Monster Farmer 3* (again, this issue), their ever-popular *Dead or Alive 3*, and their new dance sim *Unison*. They don't do much, but what they do they do well.



Microsoft, as I may or may not have mentioned, dominated the show. They had the highest number and best quality booth babes, and that was sadly enough to convince me I needed one. Well, that and the sight of the massive machine. It's quite, quite gigantic—far larger than a PS2, and at least as large as the front-loading NEO GEO CD system. The two-hour wait to try the games discouraged me, so all I have to go on are the standard 'if we only had to process graphics this is what it'd look like' demos they ran between model competitions and trapeze acts. The graphics are lifelike to the point that you criticize them for not being totally lifelike - and that's your only complaint. There's no denying the horsepower of the Xbox: it only remains to be seen if the Japanese gamers will adopt the system en masse. Oh, and the Tommyknocker-green on black color scheme was genuinely disconcerting. The girls were cute though. Money well spent.

—Lawrence Wright

GAMES 101: MAHJONG

As an import game buyer, one day you'll come across a title with top-heavy anime girls, a high price tag and the title mahjong (naturally, in kana). No, not Shanghai—this is a real game that's somewhat similar to poker. And like that gambling favorite, there's a particular flavor known as strip mahjong.

I'm sure most gamers wouldn't be interested in this ancient game without a cute, nubile anime girl taking off her clothes just for you (and a legion of other otaku) so naturally all the rules here apply to all mahjong games—strippers or no.

But first, a word of warning: most console strip mahjong games do not go beyond top frontal nudity; so don't expect hardcore pornography (that's what the Internet is for, degenerate). Most of the console strip mahjong games reside on Saturn with a smattering on 3DO (yes, it does have some Japanese developed games) as well as PC Engine. Now, onto the game...

ROAD TO THE STRIPPING KING

STEP 1: KNOW YOUR TILES

There are actually different styles of mahjong, but since we're playing Japanese video game that's what I'm going to cover. The first thing you need to do on your journey is learn the mahjong tiles which are split into 4 groups: Manzu (numbers), Sozu (bamboo), Pinzu (dots), and Zuupai (special honor tiles).



STEP 2: KNOW HOW TO WIN OR DO THIS TO SEE SOME SKIN

Your second task is to learn what makes up this age-old game. You and your opponents are each dealt 13 tiles. The goal here is to have 4 "runs" or "sets" and a pair. A "run" is a set of 3 tiles with the same number such as 7, 7, 7 while a "set" is 3 tiles that are in order such as 1, 2, 3. I assume you know what a pair is. That equals 14 tiles, and that's how you win.

Every turn you pick up a tile from your opponent's discarded pile (or the regular pile) and discard a tile from your hand unless you have a winner with that new tile. Play continues until someone has a winning hand or there are no more tiles to pick up. Sound simple? As the old saying goes: easy to learn, a lifetime to master.



STEP 3: KNOW THE TERMINOLOGY

Without knowing the words used in the game, there's no way you can win.

Riichi declared when you only need one more tile to complete your hand

Ippatsu winning one turn after Riichi is called

Tsumo winning by taking a tile from the regular pile

Ron winning by taking a tile from your opponent's discarded pile

Kan four of a kind, declaring kan allows you to get an extra draw and the 4 tiles are used as a set

Chii completing a "run" by picking up a tile from your opponent's discarded pile.

Pon completing a "set" by picking up a tile from your opponent's discarded pile, if you do this the set of tiles you completed will be shown to all players

Tenpai If all the tiles are used up, no one has a winning BUT you only need 1 more tile to win

Noten If all the tiles are used up, no one has a winning hand and you need more than 1 tile to win, it's called noten

STEP 4: KNOW YOUR PLACE

Now, you should have a decent background and can begin stripping innocent anime girls but don't think you'll easily exploit them yet. As with anything that takes skill, it's going to take advanced techniques and practice practice practice.



GAMES 101: MAHJONG



Seta's series of strip mahjong is the original game that kick-started the genre. Every iteration has improved on the visual quality of the beautiful women you disrobe and P7 is the most recent console port on Saturn. Using the 4 MB RAM cart, you'll be treated to full screen uncompressed animation that will leave you drooling like a silly little schoolboy.



This one plays more traditional but the computer will often draw a lucky tile so it may be a bit frustrating to newer players who need a quick fix. It's a bit uncertain where this series is headed now that Aruze (yes, the same pachinko people that acquired SNK) bought out Seta. The last arcade version, Super Real Mahjong Vs, ran on Aleck 64, a N64 arcade variant, so there's no chance it'll come home on the 'kiddy' machine but elements of the arcade title will be included in the Neo Geo Pocket Color's Super Real Mahjong Premium Collection which is totally uncensored. That's right! Stripping on the go!



IDOL JANSHI SUCHIE PAI II

Suchie Pai is the other mahjong series that has a rather large following due in part to its very cute character designs by Kenichi Sonoda (Bubblegum Crisis, Gunsmith Cats). Suchie Pai II on Saturn is the installment that is the most popular and it was produced before Sega started their censoring policies so you get upper torso nudity too. The play is a bit strange though. There are a number of items that let you bend the rules of the game so newbies to mahjong beware! Suchie Pai is also another series that has an uncertain future as a Hong Kong company has purchased Jaleco.



Mahjong Classmates Special

Based on the popular H ren'ai game by Elf, Mahjong Classmates Special lets you play some strip mahjong with some of the nubile girls you tried to get in the sack in Classmates. Not familiar with that title? The anime version was brought over by AD Vision and called End of Summer. More 'mature' (and trust us, in games like this we use the term very loosely) anime fans will probably quickly recognize the beautiful women in this one. What about the game itself? Loads quickly, has full screen animation, plays normally with no modified rules...every aspect is really well done.



TECH SUPPORT:RGB

Connections—The Myth

As a hardcore gamer, I always wanted the ultimate gaming setup. You know what I'm talking about: a big TV, super audio system, etc. So many moons ago I purchased a large Sony TV with s-video inputs thinking that it would give me the ultimate picture, after all, ignorance is bliss.

So after hooking up a Saturn via s-video and watching the Street Fighter Zero opening play I began to wonder why the picture wasn't as clear as the arcade version. Why does Ryu look fuzzier at home? Why do arcade games always look so clear and crisp? It all comes down to how a console is connected to a monitor, most likely a TV for the majority of gamers. It's a common myth that s-video will provide the best picture possible but that's actually far from the truth.

You see, a TV displays an image according to its red, green and blue (RGB) color components. If any of that color information is compressed along the way to the TV, it has to decompress the information back to RGB that results in a less than perfect picture.

Back in the day, all consoles came with an RF cable that plugged into the cable line. If you look at the wire closely, you'll notice that it's a thin wire that holds all of the video & audio information and is prone to interference from other electronic devices. Needless to say, this is not good and the resulting picture is just ugly—avoid using RF at all costs.

Most consoles nowadays come packaged with a composite video cable, the one with yellow, red and white ends. All of the video information is compressed on that single yellow wire which gives you an acceptable picture. Sharp-eyed gamers will notice a few defects such as dot crawl (where you can see dots moving on the edges of objects) and color bleed, which the Genesis and Neo-Geo suffer from.

The next step up, s-video, almost totally solves those problems but it isn't quite perfect. The video signal is split up into 2 wires known as luminance and chrominance. This reduces signal



interference but the image is still not pure as Pokey's mind is polluted.

Recently, a new standard called component video has made its way across America and the picture you get out of it is comparable to RGB. The problem is that only PlayStation 2 supports it. What it all comes down to is this: If you want the best possible picture quality and a standard that almost every console uses, RGB is the only choice.

XRGB-2—The Legend

Now that you understand how glorious RGB is, I bet there's one burning question on your mind: What's the easiest way to connect my consoles using RGB? Instead of resorting to small Commodore monitors and paying a lot of cash for sets of custom cables, the answer is a little gray miracle box dubbed the XRGB-2, produced by the wizards at Micomsoft in Japan.

This nifty machine will allow you to connect your consoles to any modern VGA monitor, no matter the size. Yes, you can even connect it to large HDTVs that have a VGA input. Imagine Metal Slug 3 in full color glory on a 36" screen. Every pixel's detail is displayed vividly just like a factory new arcade monitor. It's absolutely jaw dropping. Little objects that you could barely make-out before (and lots you couldn't at all) are now razor sharp—once you have got taste, nothing else will do.

Notes?

The XRGB-2 Japanese standard RGB cables, which look exactly like European SCART cables but they are wired differently. A bunch of importers don't really know what they have, so be careful when you go looking for them—make sure you specify that it's RGB and not SCART.

The Reality

ECM here: couldn't have put it better myself: RGB really is the only way to go if you want to experience games the way the developer intended. After all, they're not coding games on TV's, and you'd be stunned, staggered, stupefied by just how much better everything looks. Little details now explode off the screen and if you've ever complained about the Genesis' so-called 'limited' color palette, RGB will change your mind and quickly! If you need any help getting hooked up with RGB, mail Shou at Shou-sama@gamemagazine.com and ask nicely (he can be ornery, so be careful).

RGB READY CONSOLES:

Dreamcast
Genesis 1/2/32X
Jaguar
Master System
Neo Geo
Neo Geo CD(Z)
PlayStation
PlayStation 2**
Saturn
SNES 1

Consoles that require mods:

Amiga CD³²
NES 2*
Nintendo 64
SNES 2
Turbo Grafx-16/any 16 bit NEC machine

Consoles with no known existing mods:

3DO
Marty
PC-FX

* The chip needed for this mod is extremely hard to find

** Due to pressure from Hollywood, Sony has taken DVD RGB output out of all PS2 models after the 10000

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RetroFIT MUSHA



Once Upon A Time...

...In the dim mists of the now-distant past, when games were games and gamers were gamers, there was a freshly spawned 3rd Party destined to send into the world a few solid Japanese ports before being very quietly consumed by the shadows—an entity known as Seismic.

Among that handful of releases: Hydlide, the first true RPG on the Genesis; Air Diver, a flight combat game; and what would wind up becoming one of the greatest games ever made...



A Brief History of (16-Bit) Time

The Great Shooter Deluge arrived in the early 90's—a time when a gamer could wade through armada after armada of ill-equipped foes with reckless abandon, blasting foes from the sky (and stars) as quickly as he could tap the fire button—with one or more always popping into place as the last was consumed.

Of course, like all good things, that time came to an abrupt and sad end (as do all good things in gaming). But even after the last stray star fighter winged its way into the dark and starry night, I found myself still reaching for that one game, down through the long, cold, hard years...

M.U.S.H.A.—like a blazing ray of light to illuminate my darkest hour. Always at my



fingertips (or jammed into my Genesis and/or Nomad) it's a perfect example of not only how playable a shooter can be, but also how far the Genesis could be pushed in the 'early years.' Speaking of which...

The Early Years

Back when I was but a wee lad and nary into high school, Genesis arrived and shook the NES-dominated world. However, outside of a little something known as Ghouls N' Ghosts, nothing had really rocked my world, graphically.

Don't get me wrong, there were some nice-looking games, but nothing really over-the-top...then M.U.S.H.A. arrived. Can you say layer after layer of mind-blowing parallax? I knew you could. Warping background effects that had only been seen on the Amiga computer? Oh yeah! Sprites chucked everywhere with nary a breath of slowdown to impede your God-appointed quest to destroy the enemy armada? Can I get an 'Amen!'



Raw Unfettered Might

To this day, the aforementioned elements came together as in no other game on one level—those of you that have played it know exactly what I speak...the unearthly gorge sequence: An orgy of parallax scrolling, scaling enemies and intense action that has, to this day, yet to be equalled. Or perhaps orgy is too violent a word? Perhaps, then, an unequalled work of video game art? Obviously it can't rival today's games in sheer beauty, but certainly in the expert way in which it all seamlessly and beautifully came together. Much like how many low-budget independent films manage to shame big-budget Hollywood productions each year.

In any event, 95% of the games released today could only hope and dream of containing something as expertly crafted. This piece de resistance alone is worth the price of admission—though it's far from the only one shackled to its meager 4 megabits (not bytes) of cartridge space. I shudder to think what could be done on today's hardware; Pardon me a moment...*shudder*.

Aural Extravagance

As glorious as the graphics are, it also features one thing that stands it head and shoulders above all other titles released on Genesis: the music. While the graphics were certainly incredible, they were surpassed in quality (though not execution) by other 16-bit titles on many occasions. But the music, ah, that was never equalled. As good as the riffs in *Lightening Force* and *Streets of Rage 2* were, *MUSHA* surpassed them all. With hard-driving techno beats and expert composition on something as lowly as the Genesis' sound chip. FM synth has never sounded better. The strains of 'For The Love Of It...' haunt me to this day.

MUSHA MUSHA MUSHA

MUSHA MUSHA MUSHA MUSHA MUSHA



Synergy

And while the graphical delights and soothing strains are truly remarkable taken alone, when pitched together with the nearly seamless gameplay, well, mere words can barely describe just how special it all is. It may be "just a shooter" but what a specimen it is! Screaming across a mélange of levels featuring all the shooter clichés (having invented some of them, even), the gameplay, even on default difficulty, will test the skill of even the most hardened shooter vet.

Power up your main guns and equip one of a series of weapon upgrades as you dance with the reaper at every turn, beating back hordes of unfeeling, uncaring enemies while delivering total victory from the stygian maw of defeat.



And when you're ready for a true challenge, turn it up to hard and prepare to beg for mercy—this will keep you going when you think you can't take it anymore: a better ending awaits those that can weather the storm.

Turn Down the Lights

Sadly, shooters had their day in the sun. Though we still get some great games, none will ever be as enduring as those that made up our formative gaming years. First blush is gone, and everything else is merely colored dots on a phosphorescent screen. Prettier? Absolutely. Tighter control? Maybe. More fun? Ha! One of the greatest games ever made? Absolutely.

—ECM

The 'Other' M.U.S.H.A

It was supposed to happen, but it just wasn't meant to be: the 'sequel' to MUSHA, Spriggan on TurboGrafx CD (PC Engine CD in Japan) was scheduled for ages to make the long sail across the Pacific. Alas, with everything else that occurred at NEC and TTI, it just wasn't meant to be—but here are some screens for you to cry in your beer over (and if you ask real nicely, maybe we can whip up a 'fit' of that too down the road)..



And M.U.S.H.A. Was His Name-O!

Musha Aleste may have been the title of the Japanese game, but the clever folks at Seismic took the first part of it and turned it into a neat-o acronym:

Metallic
Unframe
Super
Hybrid
Armor



Don't forget it—there'll be a test next week.

RetroFIT NEO NECTARIS



Japan 1989 - Nectaris

Long long ago in galaxy far far away, Nectaris was created. Debating in 1989 for the now venerable PC Engine system, it featured strategic hexagonal warfare with multiple units of varying powers and abilities. If any of you have fond memories of Avalon Hill board games that utilized tons of cardboard pieces (don't sneeze) that were maneuvered around a board with many hexagonal properties, then Nectaris is right up your alley. Except you don't need to snag a neighbor to play it or find a place to store the game and it's hundreds of pieces, undisturbed, for days or weeks at a time. Trying to keep your siblings away from it was a difficult thing as well.

Florida 1990 - Military Madness

The Turbografx 16 system had debuted a year earlier with one of the best "pack in" games of all time (in my humble opinion), Keith Courage. Having stumbled to Radio Shack (the only "local" store that carried the Turbografx 16) to look for World Class Baseball, or some such nonsense, I see "Military Madness". Hrrmmmm. "Okay, I'll pick this thing up and give it a whirl", I said. Off I went in maddening heat towards my house and wasn't seen or heard from for 3 days. When I emerged, the world was safe again for I, the Union, had defeated the GUVIC in our battle for supremacy on the moon. It was a foggy 72 hours; I don't believe that I ate or drank and have no memories in that 3-day period other than the lunar-based war I was engaged in..

New York 2001 - Neo Nectaris

Neo Nectaris was released for the PC Engine Super CD in 1994. You'll need a Turbo Duo, a PC Engine with Super CD, or a PC Engine ROM with Super system card 3.0 to play this fine piece of history. And no, finding the latest ROMs and emulator doesn't count. You need the pad, the TV, the chips, and the passwords/save features to TRULY understand and

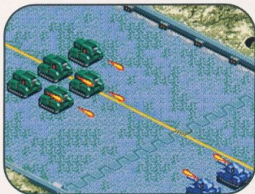
immerse yourself in the environment that is Neo Nectaris.

In 1994 and 1995, this game was a bear to find in the U.S. And, if you could find it, it was mightily expensive, regardless of your income level. These days, Neo Nectaris is a bit less expensive, but it remains a sought after title for a platform that boasted no less than 1500 or so official and unofficial releases.

Present Day - The Nectaris Experience

Neo Nectaris is not about graphics. It's not about action or reflexes or hand eye coordination, characters, hit points or experience points. It's about that thing that's behind your eyes and on top of your pillow—THAT mass of tissue that you haven't used since 9th grade algebra...if you even used it then, Kodomo.

Neo Nectaris makes you think and evaluate your strategy as well as your opponents' strategy and positions. Expect to be disappointed and lose EVERY scenario the first time you play it. Expect to lose second, third and fourth times the deeper you get into the game. If you can't handle defeat or losing, stay far away from this game.



NEO NECTARIS NEO NECTARIS NEO NECTARIS

NEO NECTARIS

NEO NECTARIS

NEO NECTARIS



What's Neo About it.

"I've played Military Madness, why do I want Neo Nectaris?" say ye of the doubting Thomas variety. The music doesn't sound like a hu card anymore. Gone is the pain of the PCE's feeble sound chip, replaced by the soothing symphonic strains of CD audio. The animations of each particular battle are more detailed and sophisticated than its predecessor. But, these aren't the really important elements, are they? Stirring music and animations aren't what you, the hardcore Military Madness player, are looking for. Neo Nectaris makes Military Madness look easy. By the time you get into the 3rd or 4th scenario, you're already pulling your hair out. Oh, and for those of you that haven't played Military Madness, this is your lucky day — because the original is included, free of charge.

What You Need To Do.

Want to beat Neo Nectaris? A few things to remember: Surround your opponents as often as possible. Your opponent is nearly always stronger than you and has more units, thereby making a victory all the more difficult to clinch—strategically surrounding opponents is wise. Also, keep your aircraft a flying far as long as possible. Try to destroy your opponent's anti-air defenses and his planes. Aircraft are immeasurable in there worth in that you can easily surround and annihilate. Ground units are slowed by terrain and have limitations on movement. Finally, destroying your



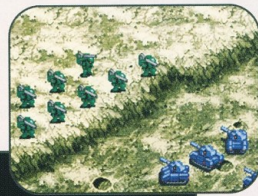
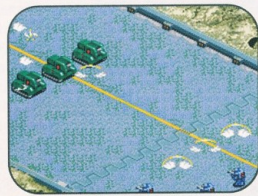
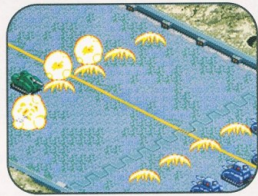
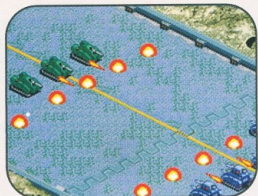
opponent's artillery and staying out of its range are also important. Keep in mind that if you're directly adjacent to your opponent's artillery, then he can't target you with it.

See you next year.

Military Madness was beatable with no sleep in 72 hours. Neo Nectaris isn't. Expect to spend many, many, many hours on this title. A final word of warning: if you're expecting action, RTS, shooting, or otherwise intensive button mashing STAY AWAY from Neo Nectaris. If you want to light a fire in the cerebellum, by all means this is your invitation.

Also Recommended: Military Madness (Turbografx 16: NEC), Neo Nectaris (Playstation: Jaleco), Nectaris (Gameboy: Hudson), Nectaris (PC Engine: Hudson) and Earthlight (Super Famicom: Hudson)

—Haohmaru



RetroFIT

Ys BOOK I & II



The Golden Age

Think back to 1990. What were you playing then? Castlevania III on NES or maybe The Revenge of Shinobi on Genesis? A few very select (and probably wealthy) gamers had the privilege of experiencing the very first console game that exploited the vast space a CD provided. Ys Book I & II on Turbo Grafx-CD took you away to a magical land called Esteria—a land filled with beautiful sights & sounds and one that, thankfully, made you forget the \$399 it cost for the CD attachment. Yes, my fellow gamers,

Ys Book I & II was and still is one of the finest pieces of art ever produced.

It talks...

Truly, this was a game that could not be done on any other console at the time. The perfect combination of aesthetics and gameplay left players everywhere stunned. During that time no one was prepared for the audio assault Ys would bring to the industry. I, for one, was shocked after watching the opening and hearing more than a few seconds of voice accompanied by digital audio bliss. Back then, hearing something like "I'm bad!" in Bad Dudes was the norm but this...this was something beyond anything I had ever heard before. Gone were the typical bleeps and bloops and in their place are arranged tracks of music originally written by the highly respected Yuzo Koshiro in his stint at Falcom. It simply doesn't get any better than this. To this day, I still put the game in my CD player for a listen.

No Boundaries

But that's only part of this digital masterpiece Falcom graced us with. Despite the limitations of the platform (there's only 1/2 megabit of RAM), Ys employed plentifully-detailed fields for our hero, Adol Christin, to journey through and major scenes were enhanced with lengthy cinema sequences or large cel-like illustrations, all accompanied by talented voice actors no less! I'm not sure what surprises me more: the quality level of acting from industry professionals in this game or the laughable "acting" we've seen in American games the last 10 years.

Balance

Beyond the aesthetics lies a simple yet elegant game system. Similar to what was seen in Miyamoto's Zelda, Adol runs around overhead screens and bumps into enemies to kill them. To prevent a player from maxing out in one area, every time a level is gained, the experience received from a monster decreases so attempting to get 65,535 experience points from an enemy that only gives you 1 point can be quickly tiring. And add in the fact that there are no extremely strong items that can be saved up for so you can't be an instant demigod. This system works so well that other developers starting using it as can be seen in later titles in the genre such as Lagoon and Xak.

See You Again

It's unfortunate that Falcom has left the console business. Maybe one day they'll return to the fans that miss them with a Ys VI, but until then we have a high watermark few developers have ever reached.

Ys Book I & II, a title that will forever remain etched in the annals of gaming history—do you know Adol Christin?



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Eternal Classic

More than a decade after its release, the PC Engine (TG-16) version still towers above all other ports of this revered classic, but Falcom is preparing the ultimate remake for release later this year on Japanese Windows: Ys I & II Complete. This new coupling combines elements from both Eternal remakes and the few things it was lacking, cinemas & voice. Perfection is coming again...



Sequels?

I'm certain many gamers have seen the disappointing Ys III on one of the major 16 bit consoles but few have seen the later installments. There are actually 2 different games that carry IV on them. Ys IV: The Mask of the Sun is the Tonkin House-developed game for Super Famicom while Falcom created the true Ys IV: The Dawn of Ys on PC Engine. The latter was once planned for Mega CD but the poor performance of Sega Falcom prevented that from going through. Ys V was created especially for the Super Famicom but fans did not care for it which the sales figures clearly show. This forced Falcom, sadly, to exit console development.

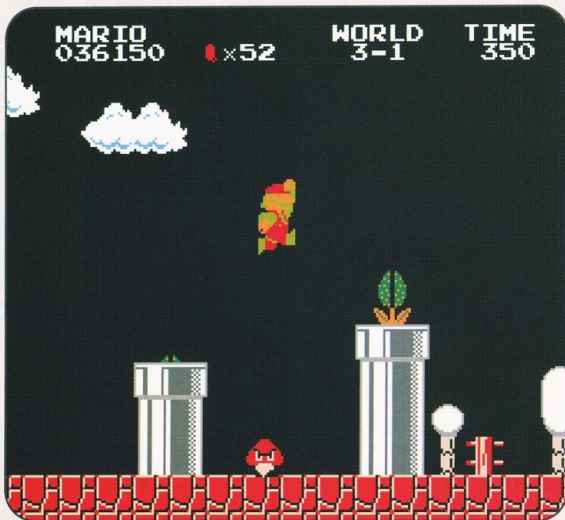
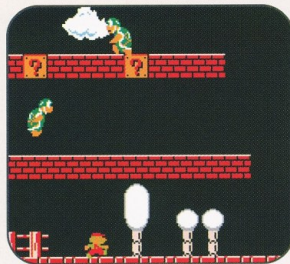


—Shou-sama

RetroFIT SUPER MARIO BROS.

Nintendo

As the 8th grade came to a close, and my disciplinary record reached Bart Simpson-like proportions, I could usually be found at the local pizza parlor pumping endless quarters into SMB in the ol' Play Choice 10 cabinet. It wasn't simply a game, but a masterfully created world that mixed equal parts imagination, action and fun. Each level wasn't a race from point A to B, but an endless proving ground for refining technique and discovering secret after secret. In the pre-2 player fighting days, when a gamers only choice was to play doubles and go for a higher score, the great players were separated from the good players by what they knew, and more importantly, how they used that knowledge to do things that were fresh and original. One hundred players could go at SMB, with each one taking a different combination of paths to get to the final castle.

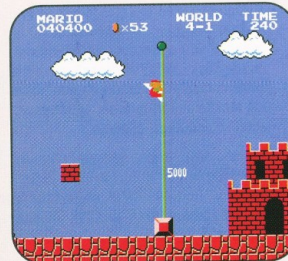
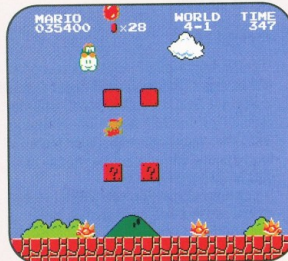
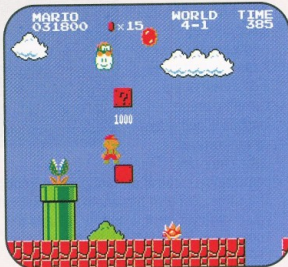


Instead of the simple few screen action of Mario Brothers (and Donkey Kong/Donkey Kong Jr. before that), SMB introduced a magical world that would've made Alice happier than any Wonderland. Turtles hung in the sky, riding clouds and dropping other creatures (whose names currently escape me...I know, the shame) which hit the ground and turned into spiked crawlers. Throughout the 8 worlds, which consisted of 4 levels each, Mario would go through land, water and castles, all in effort to save the princess from Bowser.

Both the controls and gameplay were deceptively simple, yet amazingly deep. Using only 2 buttons (plus the requisite joystick), both beginners and advanced players could be accommodated. It also seemed that the game could be described very quickly (save the princess and don't die), but that would prove to be just the tip of the iceberg. Mario could tap blocks when small, destroy them when big; crouch and jump; drop into pipes and shoot fireballs when getting a particularly intense flower. Select hidden blocks offered extra lives, vines that led to secret areas or a cache of

SUPER MARIO BROS. SUPER

MARIO BROS. SUPER MARIO BROS.



coins—it was like a fairy tale come to life...and you were in control.

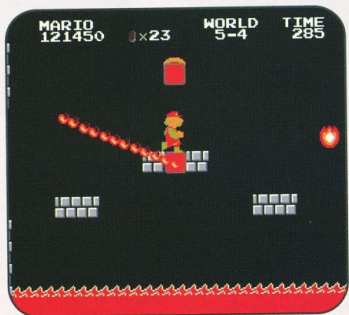
When the game finally came home, as the flagship title and arcade perfect on the NES, it was a godsend. I would trade strategies and secrets with friends, even those that weren't hardcore gamers. Conversations turned from writing competency tests to questions like "Do you know how to get infinite lives on the



stairs" and "Gotten fireballs while small yet?". And that was just the beginning.

Any quantifiable aspect of the game, be it the control (much better thanks to the groundbreaking NES control pad), the gameplay, the timely graphics or the memorable sounds, was not only better than anything seen—it was the standard bearer for years to come. I can only remember a few things about my junior high years (repression techniques work magically), but I know where I was when I heard that the Space Shuttle exploded and exactly what I was doing the day that I finally beat SMB.

And yeah, if you really want to get down to it, a few games have matched the greatness of SMB (even improving the gameplay and such), but not one game has ever come close to surpassing that



masterstroke that Shigeru Miyamoto crafted to those many years ago. If all you know is Mario 64 (an amazing game in its own right), and suffer from the delusion that that was Mario's finest hour, you're doing just that: suffering. Find the origin, the game that spawned a thousand imitators...the best game of all time.

—Kodomo

New Sega CD Games?!

Yeah, you read that right: Good Deal Games (www.gooddealgames.com) has snagged the rights to 3 older Sega CD games and has published two thus far: *Star Strike* and *Bug Blasters*. The good news is that they're brand new, never before seen games. The bad news is that they're FMV-based. BUT, if you're a collector you just know that you're going to have to have them (and as far as these games go, there is a high degree of interactivity so they're good for one play through)—I know I did. They also have a 3rd title, *Wing Nuts*, coming soon. And if these sell well, there will be more (and not just FMV). Plus, their site is a treasure-trove of cool classic game info, including some truly wonderful interviews, so stop by regardless!



Do the Twist

Like game music? Wish some of it (especially the older stuff) wasn't just sound chip-based tunage? Then get ye to DJ Pretzel's OverClocked Remix (remix.overclocked.org) and start D'ing some of your favorite old (and new) school gaming tracks. Remixed tracks from *Actraiser* to *Zelda 64* get the spiffed-up, buffed-out treatment—these are not arranged versions from Japanese game soundtracks, but all-new interpretations (some looser than others) of your favorite beats. Some highlights: F Zero JDMuteCity, Herzog Zwei (!) 'Breach,' and Contra 'Amen Reflux' to name just a few. And by the time this sees print...M.U.S.H.A. (right Pretzel?).



The Jaguar Roars

So maybe Atari does sorta live...here for your perusal we have screens of a slew of new Jaguar games coming your way later this year



Atari Lives?

Well, not really. But at Atari Labs its spirit lives on (www.atarilabs.com): A fan site that takes a dim view of the current gaming landscape and offers up an irreverent (when he's not complaining) look at current gaming trends. The same gent also has another site with all you could ever want, stand, or tolerate to know about RGB, JAMMA harnesses, and his cat at www.gamex.com—information overload? Sure, but this guy knows his stuff.

JagFest 2K1

Like the Atari Jaguar? Want to meet other enthusiasts? Then you need to get yourself to JagFest 2K1: Beyond Tempest. Saturday June 30 2001 in Milwaukee WI. Hobnob with other Jag enthusiasts, enter some tournaments and win cool prizes. For all the details, swing on over to jaguar.holyoak.com/jagfest/ which is the official JagFest web page and tell 'em GameGO! sent you.



The Undead in MGS2?

For those of you still playing the MGS2 demo: the milk has turned and your girlfriend has left you. But if you insist on going through it one more time, check out the fellow slumped over the controls in the room just prior to Olga—peer up at the ceiling and <gasp>, he casts no reflection! Since Hideo Kojima is a detail freak, we can come to but one conclusion: the man is a vampire—so watch your back, Snake! (Thanks to Michael Zadrozny for bringing this to our attention—now we're away to secure holy water and ever-so-sharp stakes—ware the night...).

Last Minute Tidbits

- The long-awaited Treasure follow-up to *Radiant Silvergun*, *Ikaruga*, has no publisher (it's currently a NAOMI-based arcade title). Still, that doesn't mean that some intrepid, US-based pub won't have the sack to pick it up soon...perhaps on another, non-Sega, platform.
- The new *Ninja Gaiden* game is "playable" according to staff at Tecmo USA: "what platform," you ask? Well, where has Ryu Hyabusa always made his mark (no, not the Lynx)?

Neo Geo Goes Portable!

No, not the NeoGeo Pocket Color, but a 'portable' unit to play full-sized Neo Geo carts on. We're not entirely sure if this is a complete put-on, but it sure looks cool, doesn't it? And we thought the PC Engine LT was a pretty neat little gadget...too bad this is a one-of-a-kind unit, meaning you'll have to track down the creator and pry it from his cold, dead hands if you want it—not that we're suggesting anything, mind you.



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Shutokou Battle 0
Armored Core 2 Another Age

HAND HELD

Game Boy Advance System
Super Street Fighter 2X (GBA)
Final Fight (GBA)
DDR GB 1-3 (GBC)
Neo Geo Pocket System
Metal Slug 2nd Mission (NGP)
SNK vs. Capcom (NGP)
Wonder Swan Color System
Final Fantasy 2 (WSC)
Guilty Gear Petit (WSC)

PS2
7/19



PS
6/7

DDR EXTRA MIX



DC
6/23



All items on this page are imported from Japan.

RENDERZ



Marian floors ECM with a startling rendition of the Cleric and Thief straight outta Capcom's D&D coin-op games. More, please...

Cammy

by Hero '01

Kevin Cameron sends us these wonderful renditions of some of our favorite gaming babes: Blue Mary and Cammy and a gratuitous Ryu (for all you ladies out there).



by Kevin Cameron/Hero



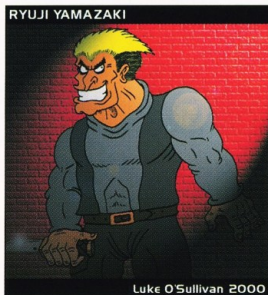
From Chris 'Bahn' Scantleberry comes Ivy of Soul Calibur fame (and near and dear to the heart of Kasumi...they belong to the same whips and chains club, if ya catch my drift). Nice job, Chris!



JEM, a regular at GameGO! chat, delivers us some DBZ action, cause we know if there's one things the kids (and Pokey) can't get enough of, it's DBZ.



Luke O'Sullivan aka Black Arts Viper shows that the Aussie's have something to say when it comes to submitting art to the GameGO! Renderz Dept. Nice work, Luke!



Luke O'Sullivan 2000



Ben Turner of GameSpy.com shows us why, despite the recent Internet downturn, he has big plans for the future with this wonderful rendition of everybody's favorite orange, truck driver shaming, hero: Q*Bert (you can kill me later, Ben).

“A pessimist sees the difficulty
in every opportunity,
An optimist sees the opportunity
in every difficulty.”

- sir winston churchill



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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Requiem For A Dream...

Gaming is dead.

There, I said it. Didn't really want to, but I did. I didn't want to tell anyone, because 99.9% of people wouldn't understand. I guessed you and your crew would.

I've waded out the rise and fall of every system since I got my Atari 2600. I've seen some crap float, some sink, and changes and trends in the business that defy common logic. Please, when I say that I think gaming is dead, don't think I am a Johnny-come-lately making rash decisions.

A while back, I found that Sega was abandoning the hardware business. I saw yesterday that SNK was filing bankruptcy. When I woke up today I found the milk had soured and faucets ran blood.

Rather than rant for pages and pages I'll just try to be quick. No 3d game can ever match the sheer beauty of 2d hand-drawn art. Never. The N64 passed away knowing only about three 2D games that I know of. The PS2 has everyone in a trance, and I see no 2D games on the horizon. Capcom is drawing out of the arcade business.

And gentlemen, the Dreamcast, which will forever be known as the Alamo of 2D gaming, is dead.

In a market where a console with such absolutely awesome software, and great future, is ground to the ground by millions of Joe-Kmarts and punk trendy scum buying whatever is popular. And game companies will sell whatever they can sell to the most people. Gaming has finally done what everyone has wanted it to do, go from the nerdy, childish hobby to mainstream success and acceptance. Thus is the price we pay.

Think if this when the billionth copy of Frogger-PS or Rise of the Robots is sold, while we still don't have any new Alien Soldier.

Yes, there will be great games. There will be the MGS, the Quakes, Sonic, Mario, Crash, and everything else ever made (now in 3D!), and a thousand other fine titles. There will never be another Art of Fighting, or Bare Knuckle. Gunstar Heroes. SF2. Contra 3.

Ahhh....true games for gamers. I remember them well.

If the new magazine turns out....you will have a subscriber for life. Thumbing through GF and EGM from 1990-2001, I realized that there will still TONS of games that deserve coverage. Tons of imports and rare releases.

If you print it, they will come.

Regards,

Travis Warren

A worthy rant, Travis, for the first issue of GameGO! Magazine. It is clear that your gaming chi flows strong, but you must remember that there are many facets of gaming to master, before you have truly ascended to the peaks upon which the master of Post-Fu sits. The wise man shuns the negative, while absorbing the positive. Yes, there have been atrocities committed in the name of 3D too numerous to count. But the years are often kind to our memories of the past and we forget that there was, most certainly, an equal measure of horrific 2D games unleashed upon a helpless public.

Carefully heed this morsel of ancient Postal wisdom, for it will serve you well: The wise man throweth not the infant out with the bathwater. While we can all agree that many of the classic 2D games of yesteryear kick more ass than much of the 3D slop that gets shoveled into the troughs of your local game shop, taking gameplay into the third dimension is not a concept without merit...when it's done correctly.

The Audience Is Listening...

Dear Posty,

As a long time fan of your work and the rest of the staffs, it came as a godsend to hear the news about GAME GO! Since the unfortunate demise of your last publication I have been forced to garner my own gaming news, which I have to say sucks. I used to rely on you guys for all my gaming news and I really valued your opinions on games, especially import wise. Trolling the internet for game news and asking the guy at the counter is nowhere near as reliable as you guys are (give me GAME GO! online!!). Now I can finally rest easy knowing I no longer have to walk into a game store, see a game I think I might like, but know little to nothing about it. While I don't always agree with you guys about everything, your always honest and that's what counts to me. By reading your reviews (opinion), I can always tell if I'm gonna like a game or not based on the info you give me. It's about time the true enthusiasts take center stage again. The hardcore community welcomes you back!! We've sorely missed you. I have a few short Qs for you also, master of Post Fu please enlighten me.

1. Will you guys be at the B5 SF tourney?
2. Are there any gaming Co.s based on the east coast?
3. Is capcom working on a new SF, IV or a new III?
4. Are there any good light gun games beside HOTD2 for DC import or domestic? (my little blaster's getting dusty)

Here's to your first issue and hopefully many many more!!!!

Somanieth Diep
Philly, PA

LETTER HEAD

The power of the Internet to quickly disseminate knowledge rivals only my own tireless efforts in instructing the thousands of Post-Fu acolytes who prostrate themselves before me, in hopes of obtaining a mere morsel of my vast knowledge. However, it is customary for these young souls, thirsting for knowledge, to present an offering of the edible variety. Unfortunately, the Internet is a cruel mistress; one without a proven revenue-generating scheme the likes of which has kept me knee-deep in Waffle Chips, year after year. So no, you will not see a GameGO! Internet edition. We're print and we're proud.

Now, I feel compelled to answer your questions...that's why I'm here, and that's why you came.

- 1. No...our skilled fighters would prefer not to embarrass anyone with their mind-numbing speed and skull-splitting technique.*
- 2. There are game companies throughout the United States, from Los Angeles to New York City and everywhere in between. No one city/state has a monopoly on game development.*
- 3. Is Capcom working on a new Street Fighter game? Hrm...gee, that's a toughie. If I said no, would anybody believe me?*
- 4. When the Columbine shootings went down and Sega of America pulled support for the light gun to appease a witchhunt-happy public, developers either shelved their plans for games that support lightguns, or tried using gamepad control, like Konami's Silent Scope. There's just not much out there to choose from. If you think that's bad, try finding a non-Sega DC fishing game to use that controller with...*

The Eternal Search For Meaning...

Dear Posty,

I've been looking for an answer to the meaning of life for so long... Once, I thought that I was getting closer as I tried to get some understanding of your deep

philosophical columns in GameFan. but then it went to an end and I thought that all my Wannabe Junior Posty fighter training would never be completed.

So I implore your infinite wisdom to shed some light on the following questions :

- 1. Is there a life after playing "Army Men" on PSX ?*
- 2. When you feel that everything is lost, when you become to realize that the gaming industry has lost his soul, where do you go to refill your heart and mind with that great feeling that is 'gameplay' ?*
- 3. Is GameGO! the answer to the meaning of life?*
- 4. Ancient philosopher once said : "If you know nothing, then you know everything". Does it imply that you will understand heartless corporate management after playing "Barbie Race and Ride" on PSX ?*

Thank you for your time Master.

A wannabe junior Posty fighter

Although your dedication to the arts is admirable, a small boat in a churning sea is lost without its compass. My return to the halls of teaching bodes well for your continued progress, as my Post-Fu fist is smooth to the bone. Meditate on these answers...

- 1. Only the eternal punishment of a living death awaits the poor souls who lay hands upon the mind-devouring, soul-scorching abomination that is the Army Men franchise.*
- 2. You already know the answer.*
- 3. No, but it's a reasonable facsimile.*
- 4. No, but it certainly explains why Mattel felt they knew what they were doing when they developed it, doesn't it?*

I Live...

POSTY!

OH MY GOD!! YOU LIVE! YOUR ALL ALIVE!! Well, some of you. Thank God, I can call my Moogles troops back from the search. I'd just want to say I'm thrilled to hear of your new mag and I wish you all good luck. Heres hoping you bring some integrity back to gaming magazines.

EvilMog

Yes, the cry that heralds the arrival of the Sinistar echoed forth across the Internet, the day www.gamegomagazine.com launched. We do, indeed, live...and with the support of readers just like you, we will also thrive. If ever you hoped to affect the game industry, if you ever wanted your voice amplified so loudly that it could be heard throughout the globe, if you truly want quality gameplay to reign supreme and to forever banish the likes of Army Men and Tomb Raider from your personal gaming world, you will support GameGO! and tell your friends to do the same. The Dreamcast, the NeoGeo Pocket...they say you don't know what you've got till it's gone. We ain't sure how many lives we've got left, but here's hoping you'll help make sure this cat keeps landing on its feet...subscribe today!



PARTING SHOT

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Starting next issue, Parting Shot will be your chance to let the world know how you feel about the hobby you love. So if you've got something you want to say in 1500-2000 words, fire them over to partingshot@gamemagazine.com (or via Posty's address for old, sorta, reliable), and if we like what you have to say, you'll see it printed here in full four-color glory. No, we're not paying and whatever you write becomes our property, but at least you'll get to see your name in lights.

The Making of GameGO!

So there I was, sitting around and weighing my options: get a 'real' job or get a soulless industry job (working for the competition was never an option—death before dishonor, I always say), when the phone rang. It was Tom Keller, all around cool guy, and proprietor of a fine import gaming shop located some leagues east of the Big Apple. We talked for a time about what had happened and what I was going to do next; how were the other guys; what did everyone plan to do, etc. Some might call them leading questions—I, being about as intuitive as a polished stone (hey, at least I'm shiny), missed the general thrust of where the conversation was going.

"What do you think about doing another magazine?" asked Tom, hesitantly. At that point I knew he was up to something, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it: "a new magazine with me—for the people that have very few options now" he continued. I was like "a gaming magazine?" and he replied "of course a gaming magazine—are you on something?!" "Video games?" I queried. "...," and some sort of slapping sound were the only reply I got—at that point I was pretty sure he was probably talking about doing some sort of video game magazine...I think.

Talking...Lots of It

So we talked and we talked...and we talked and we talked. We discussed how it would be really cool if a video game (I was sure now) magazine focused more heavily on imports and fringe stuff. How the best and typically overlooked games would get more than cursory mention or a mere half-page of coverage. How the big soulless mainstream titles would be relegated to the role of supporting player for a change; not receiving the lion's share of the coverage month-in, month-out. We prattled on about contests and a website that was complimentary to the magazine not its replacement. Paper of a quality that would allow the screen shots to actually resemble the games they were taken from and the proper (read expensive) equipment to capture them. We talked about all this and more and just "how cool" it could all be if someone just stepped up and made it...

So we did.

Never as Easy as it Looks

Only it wasn't quiet as simple as that. See, starting a print magazine (or even a print fanzine) isn't anywhere near as simple as starting, say, a web page. For one, a print magazine requires money and lots of it—you just don't get up one day and decide you're going to publish a brand new print gaming magazine...especially when the market is very soft (as it is in this brutally ugly transition period).

Then, when you have the money, you need to get a staff and of course, in our case, the quandary in attempting to do a magazine on two coasts, since I wasn't about to pick up and move back to NY (Kodomo in tow). But the staff really wasn't a problem—you'll find that out if you ever try to start your own (I think I got at least one hundred offers solely from people willing to work for free), the logistics, however, could be.

See, it's hard enough when you've got a staff beneath one roof trying to piece together what you hope will be the next big thing: differences of opinion, access to grabbing equipment, who's buying the beer, etc. are all pressing concerns that must be addressed. Now try dealing with all that when your staff is in Los Angeles, St. Louis, and New York (not to mention Neo in Japan—hi Neo!). I'm sure you can imagine the potential chaos such a situation could create (especially about that beer thing).

Surprisingly, though, we gelled like nobody's business. Sure, there were hiccups: it took three of us three days to configure and set up our grabbing equipment via the phone, email and IRC; it wasn't as easy to grab a writer that was late with a piece of work and drub him soundly; convincing ourselves that this whole thing could actually work, etc. And yeah, things clearly aren't perfect from a design or a writing standpoint, but like all things in life this magazine is, and will continue to be, a work in progress. However, for the most part, it went remarkably smoothly, as this magazine should attest. Speaking of...

Attesting

What you're holding in your hands represents the first step in taking things back to the gamers and away from the casual users, sheeple, and mainstream companies that have vampirized gaming, leaving it a cold, nearly lifeless, husk. A means to put a lot of things right, and address a great many wrongs. In short, a game magazine you'll be glad to see each and every month—one you won't greet with a fair amount of trepidation ("oh boy, what did they do this month") or a great deal of skepticism ("did they actually play the game?")—something clearly for the shipless core gamer to look at and know that "hey, I'm not alone."

Cause, hey, you're not...

—ECM



COMING NEXT MONTH

WHAT WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE

- When necessary, we can pander as well as the next guy (see centerfold and back cover).
- A 90 day hiatus is great if you actually have a magazine after 90 days.
- No publicity is bad publicity—thanks Fat Babies!
- Biz 101: When you're \$240 million in the hole, you don't deep six a profitable magazine to buy 4000 copies of the Ultima Online soundtrack.

And most importantly:

Tom Jones is the man.

COMING NEXT MONTH

SO YOU'RE JUST BARELY RECOVERING FROM THE SHOCK OF OUR FIRST ISSUE,
AND YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ISSUE TWO?
WELL, WE'RE GLAD TO OBLIGE:

- Dragonball Z: Is there anything to the mania? GameGO! takes a look at the titles released in the series thus far (console, arcade and...PC?!) and what's down the road for this 'love it or hate it' series.
- What happened to NEC/TTI: The story behind what happened to the company that brought you the 16-bit Dreamcast (i.e. a great system that died a premature death).
- Sengoku 3: The latest NeoGeo epic gets blown apart in a no-holds-barred feature that only GameGO! can bring you.
- GameGO!'s First RPG Special: Covering all the upcoming RPG's—import, domestic and unannounced.
- 32X Games Get RetroFIT: The 'lost' 32X games get opened up for your perusal next issue.
- The Return of Tales of the Hardcore, CosPlay Corner, and Setting the Record Straight—all cleverly renamed to avoid litigation.
- Expanded Renderz, so keep sending that art!
- Games 101: How to play Shmups
- MANY more pages—count on it.
- The return of Shidoshi!!!

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In the meantime, please write and tell us what you want to see in the magazine,
whether it's additions, subtractions, or overhauls. Reach us at:

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FROM THE EDITOR OF GAMEFAN...

VOL. #1, ISSUE 1

GAMEGO!



PREMIERE
EDITION

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PANIC**

PEDAL TO THE METAL

**GRAN TURISMO 3
FIRST REVIEW**

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